

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

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VEDIC PRAYERS

ईळे च त्वा यजमानो हविर्भि-
रीळे सखित्वं सुमतिं निकामः।
देवैरवो मिमीहि सं जरित्रे
रक्षा च नो दम्येभिरनीकैः॥

—Rg Veda, 3.1.15

O Agni! I, the chief sacrificer (*yajamāna*) of this sacrifice, offer oblations to you, seeking wealth and plenty. I also fervently pray to you to grant me a pure mind and spiritual intellect. For this reason, I covet your friendship. Pray on our behalf to the gods and protect us and our wealth from the hard-to-restrain powers and ignoble elements.

उपक्षोतारस्तव सुप्रणीतेऽग्ने
विश्वानि धन्या दधानाः।
सुरेतसा श्रवसा तुंजमाना
अभिष्याम पृतनेयूरदेवान्॥

—Rg Veda, 3.1.16

O great Agni! We surrender ourselves to you! The whole world is blessed by serving you and by performing favourable actions in order to obtain everything from you. Pleasing you with our excellent and powerful rice offerings, may we conquer demons and harmful powers easily.

Devotion

EDITORIAL

Ordinary Devotion

There are different types of devotion. Businesspeople have a small corner in their shops or departmental stores where they have pictures of Lakṣmī, Gaṇeśa, etc. They offer incense every day to these deities before beginning business transactions. This is one type of devotion. Some others go to some temple when they have time, once a week, or just because there is some unsolved problem haunting them, or even because there is some forthcoming event like exam, marriage, etc. They offer sweets, fruits, flowers, and money to God. This is another type of devotion. Then there are some others who worship God every day at home—since it is a family tradition—with incense, flowers, etc, and sing songs, chant mantras, performing *ārati*, and so on. This is also a type of devotion.

All such types of devotion are most certainly good and have value, say our scriptures. Śrī Kṛṣṇa has himself declared in the *Gītā*: 'Even if you offer a drop of water, a leaf or a flower to me out of love, I accept it.'¹ The Vaiṣṇava devotional scriptures have classified such types of devotion as *sāmānya bhakti*. *Sāmānya bhakti* means ordinary devotion, instances of which we saw above.

Though ordinary devotion is good, it is not the end. We cannot remain children all our lives; we grow. So with bhakti; the devotee wishes to progress rapidly along the spiritual path. Therefore there are higher and higher stages of devotion. These stages are meant for spiritual aspirants who desire to know God intimately and to love Him. The main difference between ordinary devotion and supreme devotion is, while the former is with worldly ends in view, the latter eschews the world and

aspries only after God.

A Great Definition of Devotion

There are many definitions of devotion. According to a great scholar, the following definition of bhakti is the best and an all-comprehensive one:

अन्याभिलाषिताशून्यं ज्ञानकर्मद्यनावृतम् ।
आनुकूल्येन कृष्णानुशीलनं भक्तिरुत्तमा ॥

*Anyābhilāṣitā śūnyam
jñāna-karmādi-anāvṛtam;
Ānukūlyena kṛṣṇānu-
śīlanam bhaktiruttamā.*

Having given up all other desires, seeking no help from any other path like knowledge, action, yoga, etc, and living a wholly spontaneous and harmonious God-centred life is called supreme devotion.²

The word 'Kṛṣṇa' here stands for 'God'. By 'Kṛṣṇa' any god or goddess is implied.

This beautiful definition of bhakti is found in Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī's great work, *Śrī-hari-bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. This is the standard definition of supreme devotion (*uttamā bhakti*). The devotee is like a container. In order to fill this container with the sweet nectar of devotion, it must be fully emptied (*śūnya*) of all other desires, and the protective lids of yoga, jñana, etc should be removed (*anāvṛtam*). It should be free for God's love to fill it.

Thus there are two classes of devotion: ordinary devotion (*sāmānya bhakti*), which most of us practise, and supreme devotion (*uttamā bhakti*) which is the yearned-for end.

Supreme devotion, which is absolute love for the chosen Ideal, cannot be attained all that easily. If someone attains it either by

1. *Śrīmad Bhagavadgītā*, 9.26.

2. Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī, *Śrī-hari-bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.1.11. [Hereafter, *Sindhu*.]

God's grace, or by the grace of the guru or devotees, that's providential. But not all are fortunate that way. So there are three stages: *sādhana bhakti*, *bhāva bhakti*, and *prema bhakti*.

The first stage, *sādhana bhakti*, is devotion as spiritual practice. It is also called *kṛti sādhyā*, that is, devotion which is attained through physical works. The second stage, *bhāva bhakti*, is devotion as an instinctive emotion. *Prema bhakti* is devotion as mature, supreme love for God. These three stages are together called *uttamā bhakti* or supreme devotion.

Why so many stages? It would have been wonderful had all of us developed a spontaneous love for God just as we love the world naturally. But that's not happening. So we have to grow methodically, stage by stage, towards the supreme goal of bhakti. We must attain bhakti by practising bhakti. So bhakti is both the goal as well as the way. When saints speak of bhakti as the goal, they mean supreme love for God, when the aspirant forgets even his own body and loves God with all his heart and soul. He wants nothing, seeks nothing, aspires to be nothing, thinks of nothing. All he wants is to love, love and love the Lord. Such celestial supreme love is called bhakti, and that is the goal of human beings. Nārada declared that devotion is of the nature of supreme love.³

Sādhana Bhakti: (1) Vaidhī Bhakti

Of the three stages of *uttamā bhakti*, the first stage, *sādhana bhakti*, has been further divided into two divisions by Vaiṣṇava saints. The first division is called *vaidhī bhakti* or formal, ritualistic devotion, and the second is *rāgānugā bhakti* or imitation of the love of the Lord's companions (like the cowherd boy-companions of Kṛṣṇa, disciples of Jesus, etc).

Ritualistic devotion is the following of scriptural injunctions, and is of 64 kinds. Seeking of a spiritual master and serving him, go-

ing on pilgrimages, studying the scriptures, visiting temples, etc are some of the types of ritualistic devotion. One may just recite scriptures and grow in devotion. Another may take up four or five types of services and grow in devotion. It all depends on the moods of the devotee. A devotee who engages in such acts is told to avoid mistakes during his service to the Lord (*sevāparādha*), or to His name (*nāmāparādha*). In this way, the devotee slowly weans away his mind from its habitual attachment to the world and focuses it on God.

Sādhana Bhakti: (2) Rāgānugā Bhakti

By practising ritualistic devotion with sincerity, the devotee is freed from numerous sins and tribulations (so supreme devotion is called *kleśaghñī*⁴), and he begins to aspire to higher types of devotion. He feels he must be like the *gopīs* or cowherd boys of Vrindaban,

Supreme devotion is attraction for God and God alone. There is neither desire in the heart of the aspirant.

for instance, who were so dear to Kṛṣṇa. He wishes to imbibe their way of loving Kṛṣṇa. While their love is natural attraction (*rāgātmikā*), this aspirant is only imitating them now and so his love is a semblance of that real attraction (*rāgānugā*). He aspires to the same feelings, attraction, emo-

tions. Such *sādhana* will help in manifesting all the good qualities in the devotee (and so supreme devotion is called *śubhadā*⁴). The devotee's good qualities make him yearn for the grace of the Lord, and also to become more and more dear to Him.

However, there are still worldly elements left; the world keeps on pulling the devotee towards it. But the devotee strives to overcome his lower tendencies and to win the Lord's as well as the devotees' grace over by his practices. This type of aspiration, when it matures, leads to the second stage of supreme devotion, *bhāva bhakti*.

3. *Sā tvasmin parama-prema-rūpā. —Nārada Bhakti Sūtras, 2.*

4. *Kleśaghñī śubhadā mokṣa-laghukṛt sudurlabhā; Sāndrānanda-viśeṣātmā śrīkṛṣṇākarṣaṇī ca sā —Sindhu, 1.1.13.*

Bhāva Bhakti

As mentioned earlier, a devotee can reach the *bhāva bhakti* stage either by the grace of God or the devotees, or by practising *sādhana bhakti*. In the earlier stage, the devotee was perhaps imitating a cowherd friend of Kṛṣṇa. Now his moods deepen. He behaves more and more like the cowherd boy. Such devotion is called a semblance (*ābhāsa*) of *prema bhakti*. But the greatness of this devotional stage is, the devotee develops *rati* or attraction for God, and his devotional mood can become a permanent sentiment soon.

As attraction for God grows, the bhakta never wastes a moment, thinks of Him at all times, and spreads His glory everywhere; the devotee develops love for His abode too.⁵ Moreover, such a devotee has no doubt at all about God or about attaining Him. He has great yearning now. He doesn't care for liberation or any such thing (and so supreme devotion is called *mokṣa-laghukṛt*⁴). His state is called 'hot' (*uṣṇatvam*) in the devotional texts. This is because, owing to the ambition to attain God, the devotee becomes greatly restless. He feels no peace till he attains that which is hard to attain (*sudurlabhatvam*⁴).

Prema Bhakti

The final stage is *prema bhakti*. This is a supreme state, says Sri Ramakrishna, which comes after *mahābhāva*, and is difficult for ordinary souls to attain:

The mature stage of bhakti is bhāva. When one attains it one remains speechless, thinking of Satchidānanda. The feeling of an ordinary man can go only that far. When bhāva ripens it becomes mahābhāva. Prema is the last. ... Only for Īśvarakotis, such as the Incarnations, is it possi-

ble to have mahābhāva or prema.⁶

It is a state which Rādhā, Śrī Caitanya, Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swamiji, etc had attained. Again, scriptures say that Prahlāda, Nārada and others had attained this stage. Even this stage can be had by the grace of God (*hari-prasādottham*) or through effort (*bhāvottham*). Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī quotes a *Pañcarātra* verse to this effect: 'Just as Bhīṣma, Prahlāda, Uddhava, Nārada and other blessed souls had it, this *prema* is extreme attachment and "my-ness" towards the Lord.'⁷ This is the final stage, say scriptures, where lover and Beloved become one. Hence, at this stage, the devotee will not have to struggle for the Lord but the Lord is attracted to him like a magnet (and so supreme devotion is called *kṛṣṇākarṣaṇī*⁴). The devotee need not imitate any companion of

the Lord; his very soul will become transformed into a beloved of the Lord and he enjoys constant bliss (so supreme devotion is called *sāndrānanda-viśeṣātmā*⁴).

'Bhakti-yoga is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing, and ending in love.'

Principles of Supreme Devotion

In this way, a seeker aspiring to love God will first follow scriptural injunctions, later the living examples of saints and God's companions, and still later, attains natural love for Him. This scheme is called supreme devotion or *uttamā bhakti*.

In the definition of *uttamā bhakti* the following three fundamental principles have been stressed: (a) the very root of desire for anything other than the Lord is removed (*anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyatvam*); (b) this path needs no help from other paths or methods of sadhana, like those of knowledge, yoga, karma, etc (*jñāna-karmādi-anāvṛtam*); and (c) the devo-

5. *Kṣāntṛ-avyartha-kālatvam viraktir-māna-śūnyatā; āsābandhaḥ samutkaṇṭhā nāmagāne sadā ru-
ciḥ; Āsaktis-tad-guṇākhyāne pritis-tadvasati-
sthale; ityādayo'nubhāvāḥ syuḥ jāta-bhāvāṅkure
jane.* —*Sindhu*, 1.3.12-13.

6. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1985), pp. 502-3.

7. *Ananya-mamatā viṣṇau mamatā prema-saṁgatā; Bhaktir-ityucyate bhīṣma-prahlāda-uddhava-nāradaih.* —quoted in *Sindhu*, 1.4

tee chooses a favourable attitude of love, which is pleasing to the Lord, and follows Him always (*ānukūlyena-kṛṣṇānu-śīlanam*).

Non-Desirousness

The first principle of supreme devotion is that the devotee has no desire for anything other than the Lord. The famous couplet of Śrī Tulsidās says that the two—love for the world and love for Rāma—cannot go together. Rūpa Gosvāmī says something more: he says that in a true devotee, not only have desires been eliminated, but the very root of desire has also been eliminated. No desire can sprout in the heart of such a soul: neither is there the desire for worldly wealth, nor for liberation. Desire springs from *vāsanās* or past impressions. The only *vāsanā* of the devotee is to love God.

Swamiji defines bhakti as follows: 'Bhakti-yoga is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing, and ending in love.'⁸ He compares devotion to a triangle and says: 'The first angle of the triangle of love is that love knows no bargaining.'⁹ This is what Rūpa Gosvāmī says in different words: *anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam*. Why should we not seek anything other than God? 'To worship God even for the sake of salvation or any other reward (is) equally degenerate. Love knows no reward.'¹⁰

Fearlessness

The second principle of supreme devotion according to Rūpa Gosvāmī is that no other path is required to assist bhakti. Bhakti is self-sufficient (*jñāna-karmādi-anāvṛtam*). Those aspirants who go for the path of knowledge are scared to be bound to the world; they want moksha. Those after yoga are frightened of suffering; they want *kaivalya*. Those who practise the path of karma are terrified of the consequences of their past actions; they want

mukti. But the bhakta is not scared of anything.¹¹ He loves the Lord, and doesn't care what happens to him in the future.

Speaking about the second angle of the triangle of devotion, Swamiji says that 'love knows no fear.'¹² What should the devotee fear? He is not afraid of God or his own sins or the future. All he seeks is love.

Amicability

According to Rūpa Gosvāmī, the third important principle of devotion is that the devotee follows the Lord amicably or favourably (*ānukūlyena kṛṣṇānuśīlanam*). We know how Rāvaṇa hated Rāma; but through his hatred, he was only thinking of Him. We know how Kāṁsa hated Kṛṣṇa; through his hatred he was only thinking of Him. So with the others who practised adverse paths. But such things aren't pleasing to the Lord. The devotee has to love him congenially and with genuine love.

Swami Vivekananda says about the third angle of the triangle of love: 'The third angle of the love-triangle is that love knows no rival, for in it is always embodied the lover's highest ideal.'¹³ Why should there be no rivalry? 'The synthesis of all the highest ideals of beauty, of sublimity, and of power gives us the completest conception of the loving and loveable God.'¹⁴ When God is the only goal and only object of love, there can be no place for hatred or ignoble practices. There will only be a positive flow of love towards Him.

Conclusion

Such a supreme devotee, who has no desires, who knows no fear, and who knows no rivalry, will be the ideal devotee. He alone can love God truly, and will attain the highest, say the scriptures. □

8. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), Vol. 3, p. 31.

[Hereafter, *Complete Works*.]

9. *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 87.

10. *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 88.

11. *Bhukti-mukti-sprhā yāvat piśāci hr̥di vartate; tāvad-bhakti-sukhasyāsya katham-abhyudayo bhavet.* —*Sindhu*, 1.2.11.

12. *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 89.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

Who Discovered Mohenjo Daro?

We have published an article on Indus Valley civilization this month. But who discovered Mohenjo Daro? Sir Arthur Keith wrote an article in *Referee* (London) in 1928 saying that it was Sir John Marshall who discovered Mohenjo Daro in 1924. He also wrote: 'Several trial shafts were dug and by 1924 Sir John Marshall realised that he had gained access to a lost and buried world of humanity.' In reply, Professor Rakhal Das Banerji wrote in *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* (November 1928): 'Mohenjo Daro in the Larkana district of Sindh was excavated by the present writer for the first time in December 1922. The following year, Mr Madho Swarup Vats continued the excavation at the same place. He was followed by Mr K.N. Dikshit. From the beginning of the cold season of 1925-26, Sir John Marshall took direct charge of this site. There was no mound covered with alluvium at Mohenjo Daro, and none of us had to go thirty feet down to find "mouldering" bricks. Systematic excavations were carried out by me and by Pandit Madho Swarup Vats in 1923-24, even before the news of the discovery reached the ears of Sir John Marshall, who did not know anything of Mohenjo Daro before May 1924 and paid the first visit to that place in January or February 1925.'

The First Banks and Bank Managers

Warren Hastings proposed in 1773 the establishment of a General Bank for the provinces of Bengal and Bihar. This was the first attempt to start organized banking in India under British authority. The plan was accepted by the Council at Fort William, Calcutta, and two Indian gentlemen, Huzuri Mal and Rai Dayal Chand, were appointed the first managers of the bank. The profit of the first bank during the first three months was Rs. 29,560.

A Tribute

Al Mas'ūdī, a famous observer of a millennium ago, says: 'The Hindus are distinct from all other black people in point of intellect, government, philosophy, strength of constitution, and purity of colour.' (Quoted in *The History and Culture of the Indian People*, ed. R.C. Majumdar, Vol. 4, p. 391.)

Mining in Ancient India

The Hindus were the first to discover gold, say Roscoe and Schorlemmer. The Hindus of the fifth century BC supplied gold to the Persian empire, and the art of examination of the genuineness of gems was well-known by the first century BC according to Śūdraka's *Mrcchakatikā*.

A Pilgrimage to the New World

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

Swami Smarananandaji is General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Revered Maharaj has been visiting different places on invitation to deliver lectures and promote the cause of Vedanta. He recently visited the Ramakrishna Order's centres in America. Upon repeated requests, he penned down his feelings and experiences of the tour. We hope our readers will greatly benefit from these beautiful memoirs. This is the eighth in the series.

SACRAMENTO

Sacramento is the capital of the state of California. It is a beautiful, quiet city, full of greenery. Our centre is on an 8-acre plot, full of trees bearing fruits and flowers. The single-storeyed building, an L-shaped one, contains the chapel, office, and living rooms. It looks like one of our Indian ashramas.

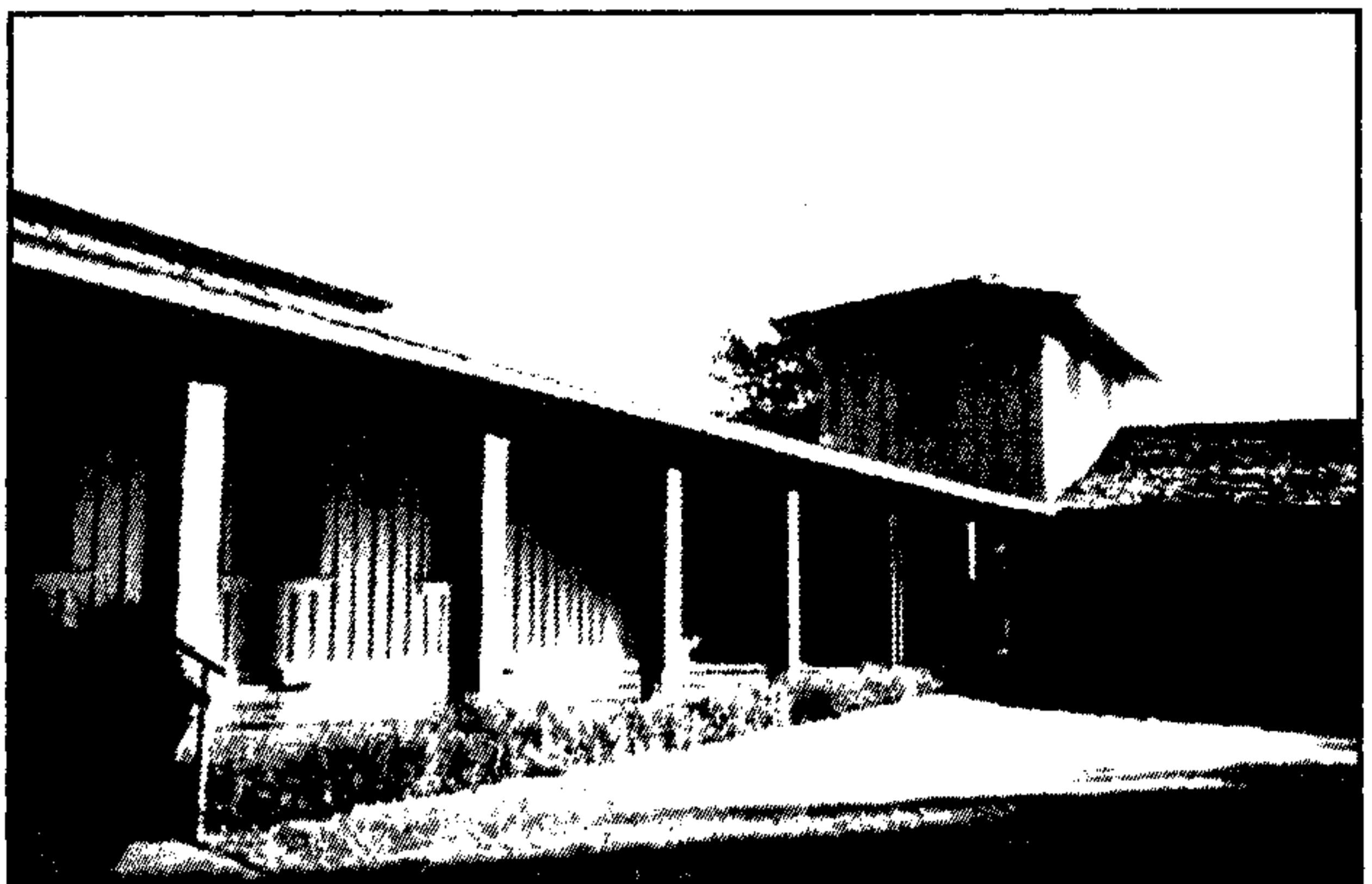
On Sunday, I spoke to an audience of 50, mostly Americans, on 'Vedanta and Modern World'. That afternoon and the next day were spent in sightseeing. Sacramento is situated on the confluence of the Sacramento river and the American river. The old city is preserved as it was in the 19th century, evoking old-world nostalgia. The Rail Museum has many interesting exhibits. The railroad was the main mode of transport when Swamiji visited California a hundred years ago. It is now used mostly for freight traffic, as most people travel by air and automobiles. A model of Pullman, which was the aristocratic form of travel during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is exhibited, with an original coach. The movement of the train is simulated to make you feel you are travelling!

WASHINGTON DC

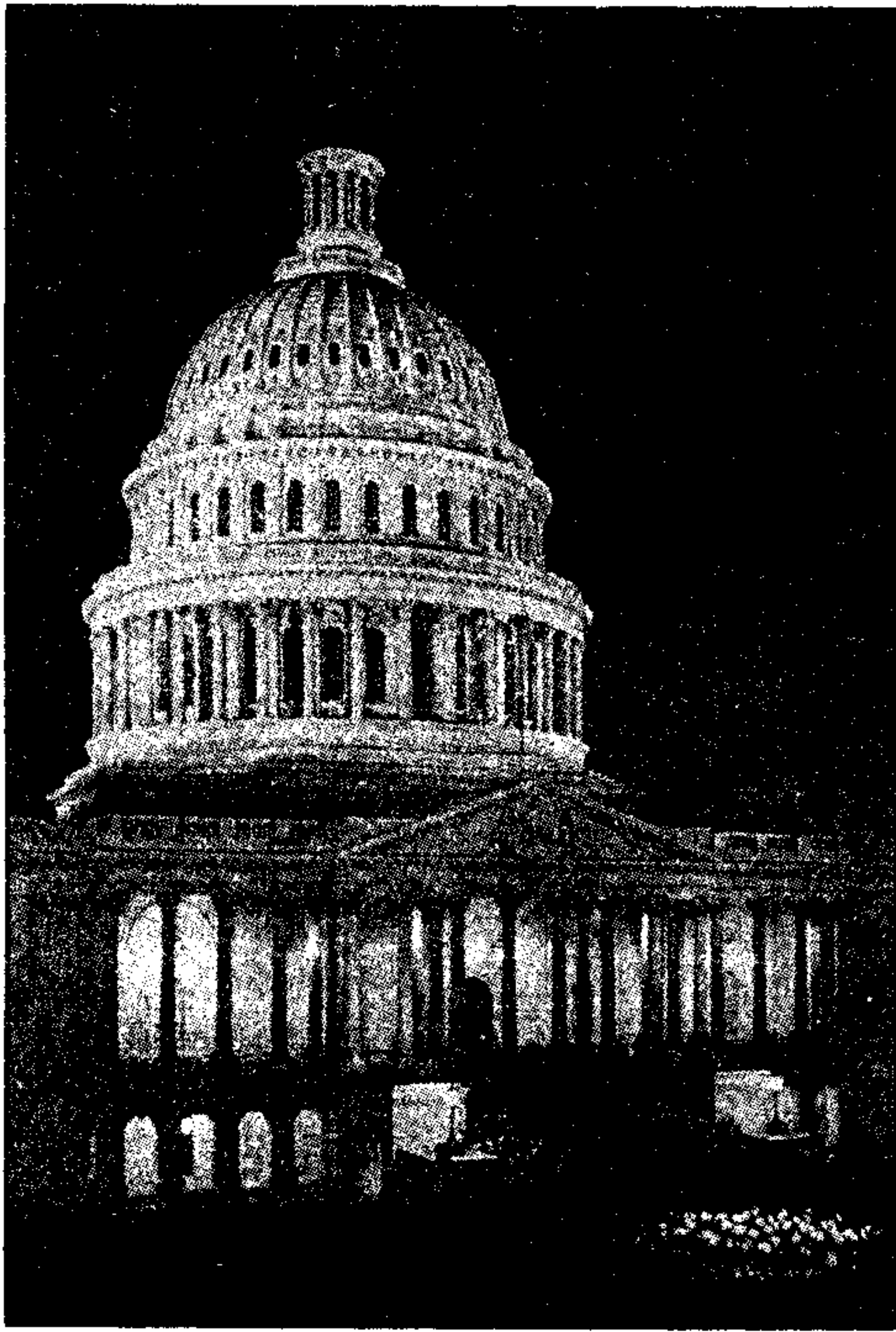
On 6 June 2000, I left for Washington DC in the morning and reached there at 4.15 pm. (The East Coast time is 3 hours

ahead of Pacific Time.) I reached our centre at 5.15 pm. Swami Swahananda, head of the Hollywood centre, has extended his arms towards the East Coast. Thus the Vedanta Society of Greater Washington DC has come up; it is a so-called sub-centre, situated in a 5½-acre plot on the highway, of which he is the president. Swami Atmajnanananda from Hollywood has been placed in charge of this centre. Mr Jayanta Sircar actively helps Swami Atmajnanananda in running it. A new building costing \$500,000 was to be inaugurated on 10 June.

Next day morning, a devotee by name Mr Surinder took me for an outing to see the Capitol and the Rotunda. We had to stand in the queue for half an hour. This is a magnificent structure, 287ft high. The Capitol build-



Vedanta Society of Sacramento



The Capitol

ing has grown over a period of two centuries to its present grandeur. When the original sandstone facade deteriorated, it was covered by marble. The paintings in the Rotunda and the statues representing each state of the Union preserve the history of the United States in a grand manner.

From there we went to see the Lincoln Memorial and the Jefferson Memorial. Abraham Lincoln is considered the greatest president of the USA inasmuch as he even risked a civil war and his own life to vindicate the nation's creed that 'all are born equal', and therefore slavery was immoral. Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the nation, had laid down the principles of the American Constitution with a broadness of vision rarely equalled. The chronic parking problem seemed to be dogging me everywhere as it was here too. We could find a parking place only a

mile away and had to walk in the sun towards the Lincoln Memorial!

Washington DC, the capital of the United States, is indeed a wonderful city. The Potomac river and the tree-lined avenues and the greenery everywhere makes it an ideal city. From Lincoln Memorial the view is marvellous.

Next morning, Mr Amar Pal took me downtown to see the museums of the Smithsonian Institution. He said that it would be better to go by metro rail, as it would be difficult to find parking space during the rush hours. But, after going to the nearby metro rail station, we could not find a place to park the car in a 4-level parking lot! Anyway, we went by car to the museum and were fortunate to get a parking place, which a few minutes' delay would have deprived us of!

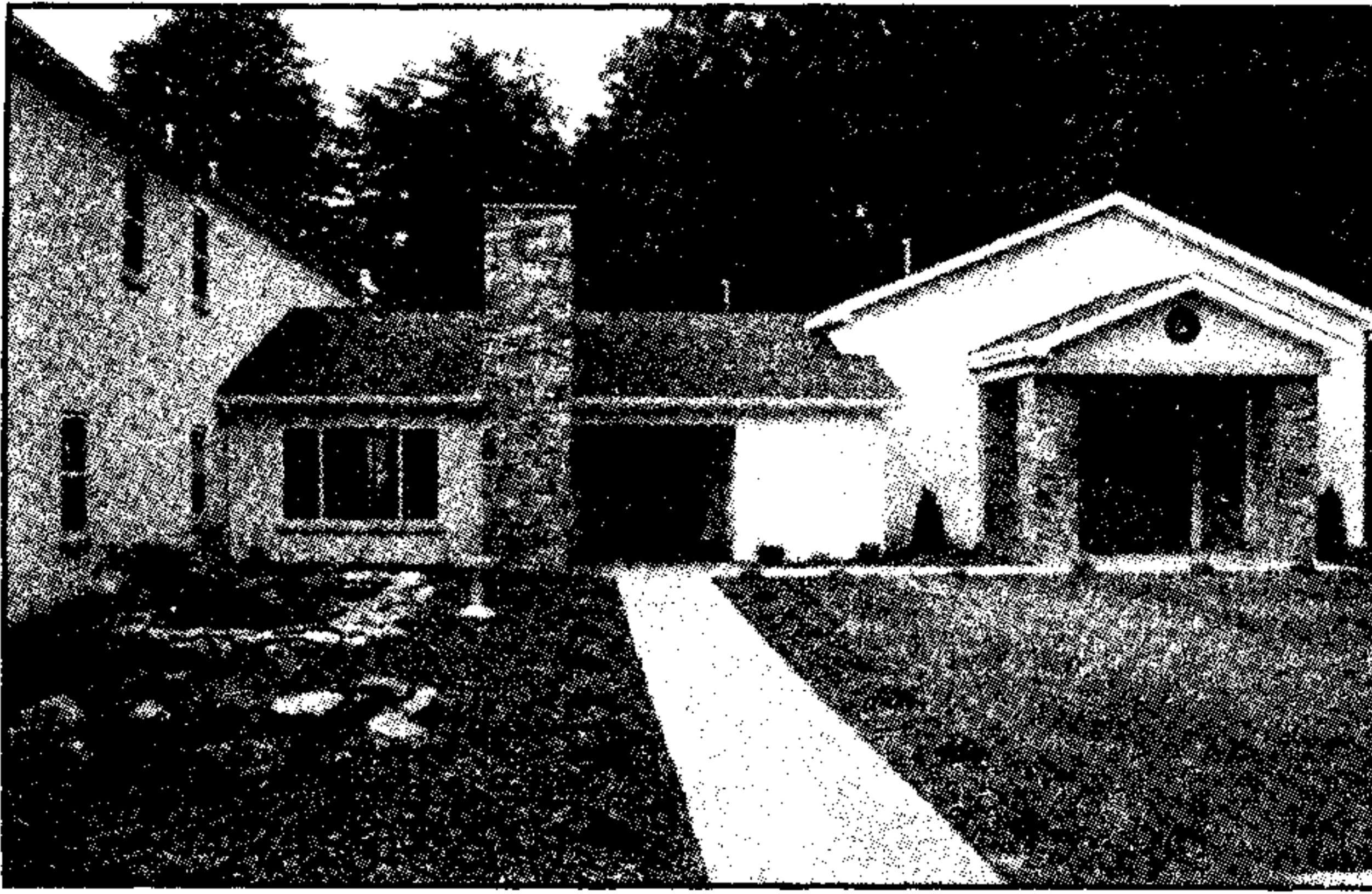
There are many museums and libraries, etc in huge buildings. In the Air and Space Museum, we viewed the 'cosmic-voyage' on an IMAX screen. It is really terrific! Then we went to the art galleries and natural history museum. To see all these in detail would take two or three days.

The next morning, Mr Surinder took me to see the great falls of the Potomac river. It is a wonderful scenery, with dense forest all around. In the evening, Swamis Swahananda Atmajnanananda and myself spoke to an audience of 150 people, predominantly Indians.

Next morning, 10 June, I inaugurated the new chapel at the centre, and Swami Swahananda and myself spoke to an audience of 200 people. Many people had to stand as all the chairs were occupied.

NEW YORK

On 10 June, I left Washington DC at 2.30 pm. The flight reached the La Guardia Airport, New York, at 5:30 pm. Swamis Adiswarananda and Tathagatananda, heads of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center and the Vedanta Society respectively, were at the airport. We drove to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, situated in the prestig-



Vedanta Society of Greater Washington DC

ious Manhattan Island. The 94th street, where our centre stands, connects the 5th Avenue and Madison Avenue, and is very near the Central Park. In New York all buildings rise skywards and have common walls with adjoining buildings. Over and above that, it was so hot, reminding us of Indian summer.

Next day, 11 June 2000, was a Sunday. I had my usual morning walk, accompanied by Swami Vidananda (Barry). At 11 am, I spoke to an audience of 200 people on 'The Modernity of Sri Ramakrishna's Religion'. In the afternoon, Peter and Barry took me to show a few landmarks—the United Nations building, the Statue of Liberty, Brooklyn Historical Society where Swami Vivekananda spoke, etc.

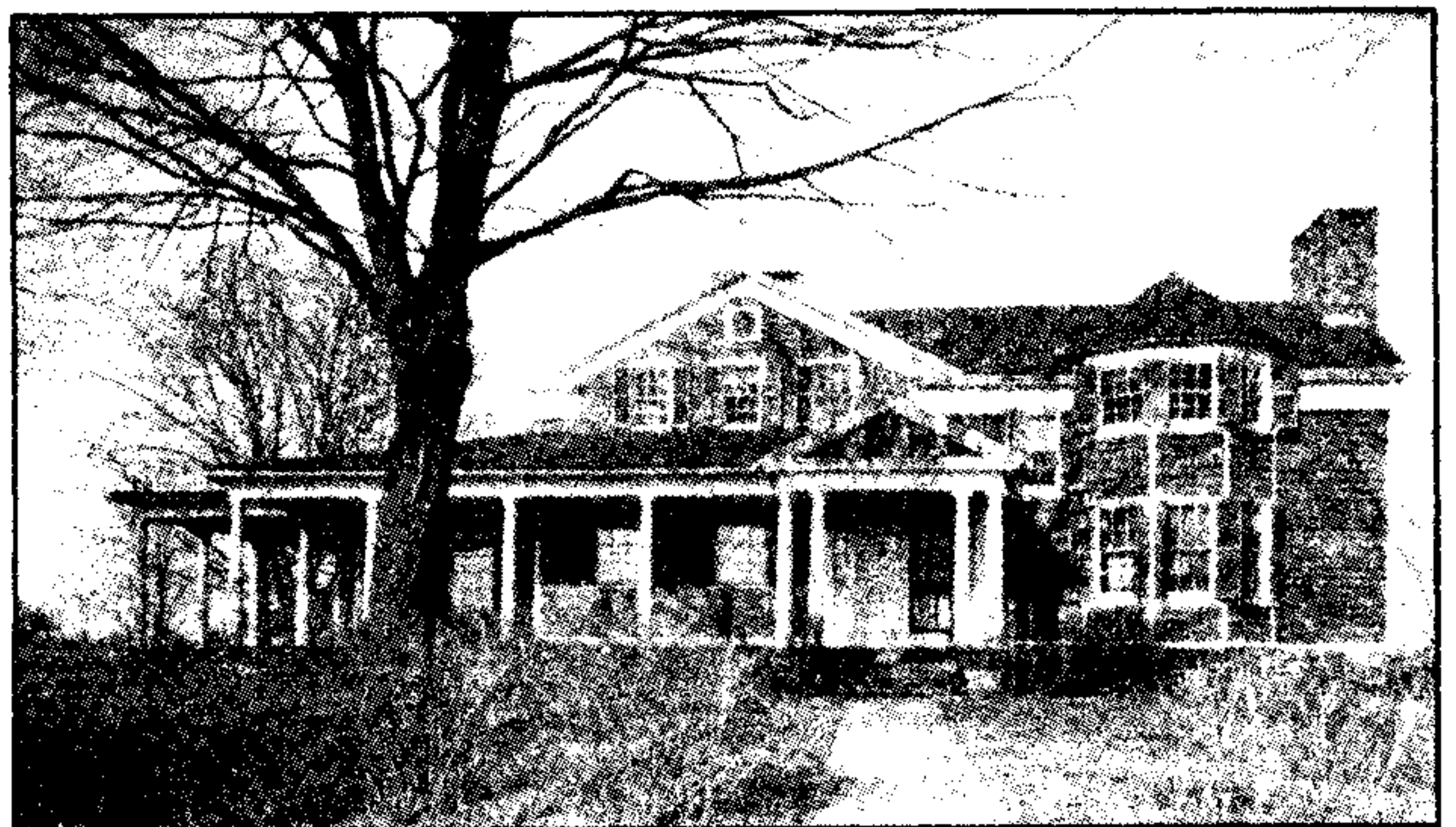
Puerto Rico is an American colony in the Caribbean. A great number of the Puerto Ricans live in New York, the biggest city in the USA. The Puerto Ricans, who are Spanish, take out their annual whole-day-long procession on the 5th Avenue, about a million people singing and dancing all the way. This event took place that day. For facilitating the procession, the 5th Avenue was cleared of all traffic by the police.

Even then there were traffic snarls in other parts of Manhattan. All this reminded me of Kolkata.

Next day, I left with Swami Adiswarananda, Barry and Dr Gour Das (who had come from Kolkata) for St Petersburg in Florida. We landed at Tampa Airport at 4:45 pm, and drove to St Petersburg, 30 minutes away. The Vedanta Center of St Petersburg is run by American devotees, with Swami Adiswarananda as their spiritual adviser. The swami comes once or twice a year from New York and spends a few days

here. The society has an ashrama-like atmosphere with a large two-storeyed building having spacious rooms, kitchen, etc, a separate chapel which can hold 120 people, and a garage—all amidst a small garden. The ashrama is situated almost on the bay, and the climate is tropical. This city is rather quiet, with a slow-paced life. After a western supper at 8:30 pm, we retired at 10:15 pm.

Next day morning I was taken for an outing. In the evening, I spoke on 'Swami Vivekananda's Message of Vedanta'. About 100 people were present, mostly Americans. The devotees here are a happy group, like a large family. Some devotees have bought the



Ridgely Manor: Swamiji stayed here



Vivekananda House at Vivekananda Retreat, Ridgely

houses adjoining the ashrama so as to take care of and maintain the place. We returned to New York by 12 noon.

On 15th morning I left for Ridgely Manor in Stone Ridge county. Swami Atmarupananda came with a car to take me and Dr Gour Das there. We reached Ridgely by 11 am. Heavy fog and a slight drizzle had made the atmosphere cool.

Ridgely Manor belonged to Francis Leggett, who was a close friend of Swami Vivekananda's. Swamiji stayed in this big manor twice during 1895. He visited it again in 1899 and stayed in a cottage right on the road, very near the entrance to Ridgely, for nearly seven weeks. When it was bought two years back, the property consisted of 83 acres of land with three buildings. This was acquired by Swami Swahananda on behalf of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. He is the president of the committee, while Swami Atmarupananda is in-charge. Apart from the big manor, there are two buildings, one for women retreatants and the other for men. There is still a debt to be cleared in order for it to be free from the mortgage.

Swami Swahananda had already arrived the previous day, and we had a restful day on the 16th. There was no activity except for a visit to a tourist spot among the Catskill

Mountains, where a lake, a beautiful garden, and a big hotel attract tourists.

On Saturday, the 17th, I spoke to more than 50 assembled devotees. Peter and his wife Mithu (Sanghamitra) had also come from New York. We left for the New York Vedanta Society in the afternoon: Swami Atmarupananda and myself in one car and Dr Gour Das in Peter's car. It's a three-hour drive. This Vedanta Society, which is on the western side of the Central Park, was started during Swamiji's visit to New York in 1894. But the

present building was bought some two decades later. It is the oldest centre of the Order in the West. Swami Tathagatananda is the head of the centre. On Sunday morning, I spoke on 'Sri Ramakrishna, Vedanta and Modern Man'. An audience of 130 was there, of whom 60% were Indians.

We left for Queen's Island, NY, from the Vedanta Society at 3:15 pm, where some Bangladeshis were running a Vivekananda Cultural and Philosophical Center. The chief enthusiast is Prakash Chakraborty from Dhaka, an active and enterprising young man. He is employed in a firm, but has set his sights higher. An audience of 50-60 Bangladeshis was present. I spoke to them for 30 minutes in English and for 20 minutes in Bengali. The Bangladeshis, both Hindus and Muslims, are well settled in the US. We left the centre by 6:30 pm and reached Ridgely by 8:30 pm. It was not dark even then!

Next day, though the morning was cloudy, the sky brightened up as the day progressed. Swami Atmarupananda took us to a Tibetan Buddhist monastery near the Catskill Mountains in the charming little town of Woodstock. The monastery appeared to be flourishing. In the evening, I met some devotees from New Jersey, etc who visited us.

(to be continued)

Sri Ramakrishna

DR S. RADHAKRISHNAN

Philosopher and statesman of repute and the second President of India, Dr Radhakrishnan was a multifaceted personality. His thoughts on Sri Ramakrishna, based on a talk given decades back at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, are reproduced below.

Sri Ramakrishna represents the conscience of authentic religion. There is only one religion but many religiosities, as has been well said. Only that religion which is universal was represented by Sri Ramakrishna. He is the symbol of the message of India for mankind—the message of unity and reconciliation. From the beginning of our history, many races and many religions met on this sacred soil in one supreme attempt to reconcile them all, to make out that the world consists of one people, the different peoples being merely the branches of that one universal human race. That was the theory which was given visible embodiment in the life and work of Sri Ramakrishna.

This theory comes to us from the depths of our own past. What has happened in Sri Ramakrishna's life is the corroboration by personal experience and testimony of that fundamental truth. Never did we regard religion as subscription to a creed or performance of a rite. It was to us a passionate participation in the mystery of the true being. For us religion meant a personal awareness. When Vivekananda asked Sri Ramakrishna, 'Have you seen God?' his answer was, 'I see Him as I see you, but more intensely.' In other words, religion for Sri Ramakrishna was personal insight into Reality, and experience and awareness of Truth.

This was our doctrine from the beginning. In the *R̥g Veda* we read: 'As the naked eye sees the sky, sages see constantly the highest dwelling place of the Supreme.' In the Upaniṣads and in the *Bhagavadgītā* we find this

intimate communion of the individual soul with God.

That God exists is the theory of those who know God by hearsay and inference. There are others who say: 'I have felt God in the personal impulses of my being; I know God because I have experienced that Reality.' The persistent feature of our religious life has been that religion does not consist in the profession of a creed, in the subscription to formulas, in the mechanical performance of rites, but it consists in entering into the very heart of Reality, the transformation of our being from within, the renewal of our consciousness and the development of a new mind altogether.

We are called upon to develop that God-consciousness which Jesus Christ felt. It is that God-consciousness that Sri Ramakrishna felt. He therefore lifted his religion above formulas and dogmas. Here was a God-man who, starting from a limited sectarian worship, raised it by his personal experience into universal consciousness of the Supreme. That is one central feature of our religion. Another feature that has come down to us, and which has a moral for us in the present day whose dominant character is fanaticism, is freedom from dogmatism, absolute freedom of interpretation, freedom of expressing that mysterious Reality in ways which appeal to our minds and consciousness, admitting all the time that it is impossible to enclose within words and concepts the supreme Reality.

You can never understand and formulate in intellectual terms the truth of that Being. So our discussions are always halting. They are

imperfect and there is no right for us to quarrel about interpretations. We do not know the full nature of what electricity is, yet we pretend to know the supreme Being. There cannot be a greater paradox than this. What we say is this: This Reality which we experience through our whole being cannot be expressed in adequate terms by any phrase, by dogmas or creeds. We said that in the *Rg Veda*: 'Sages speak of it in various ways.' We find it in the inscriptions of Ashoka. The truth is, we must honour all sects. We find this again in the *Bhagavadgītā*: 'In whatever form you worship Me, in that form I accept you.' We find it in Shankara. We realize that the different sects are revelations of the one supreme Reality. This is in consonance with the whole trend of our religious toleration and religious appreciation which have been there from the times of the *Rg Veda*, Ashoka, the *Bhagavadgītā*, from modern prophets down to our own times.

Sri Ramakrishna gave to it a practical demonstration. He did not simply say it as a theory. He put it to the test. He practised the different cults, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, and came to the conclusion that all these lead to the same goal and that it is foolish to quarrel about them. He gave testimony to it and expressed it in that particular way.

Not only did Sri Ramakrishna say that different creeds lead to the same goal but he also held that different disciplines lead to the same goal. Whatever the forms, all knowers of Truth were greeted by Sri Ramakrishna: 'My salutations at the feet of the jnanis! My salutations at the feet of the bhaktas! I salute the bhaktas who believe in God with form, and I salute the bhaktas who believe in God without form. I salute the knowers of Brahman of olden times. And my salutations at the feet of the modern knowers of Brahman.'

We never abolish forms that appeal to us. There are some people who are fanatic and iconoclastic in their tendencies. But our tradi-

tion is of a different character. We never, in any iconoclastic spirit, obliterated the forms that did not appeal to us. We recognized the forms as different ways of discovering our own Self, without any mask of vanity. Not only with regard to doctrine but with regard to disciplines also Sri Ramakrishna in his life gave a kind of harmonizing synthesis. That was what he established.

Again, he was not one who revelled in this mystery of absolute consciousness, neglecting the world or leaving it to rack and ruin. He asked how a man could be religious with an empty stomach. Unless you are able to provide food, clothes and shelter to people, how can you expect them to be religious? Let not men spend all their energies in trying to keep the wolf from the door. Give them the facilities of expansion. Sri Ramakrishna was not neglectful of the problems of this world. If we are authentically religious we shall never adopt any kind of exclusive attitude. We have to realize that what is unique is at the same time the most universal also. When we adopt that kind of philosophy it will be impossible for us to repudiate anybody as a useless criminal or beyond hope of redemption. We shall then recognize the fact that everybody has the chance of rising to the full stature of life. That is the way in which Sri Ramakrishna put forth his theory. He came to the conclusion that 'when I feel that the world is filled with Rama, how can I go on teaching other people?'

Sri Ramakrishna, a few days before his passing away, called his disciples and offered a blessing to each one. Each got the blessing that suited his particular temperament. That again is something which is not unknown to us. A Sanskrit verse says: 'May all cross the difficult paths of life, may all see the face of happiness, may all possess wisdom, may all enjoy everywhere.' What Sri Ramakrishna did was in consonance with that famous precept.

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Immured Monk

SVEN HEDIN

Here's something stunning! The story is related to monks who lived exemplary lives. The region concerned is Tibet of about a century ago. We publish excerpts from a three-volume book, Trans-Himalaya, by Sven Hedin (London: Macmillan & Co, 1910).

We had heard of a lama who had lived for the last three years in a cave in the valley above the monastery of Linga, and though I knew that I would not be allowed to see either the monk or the interior of his ghastly dwelling, I would not miss the opportunity of at least gaining some slight notion of how he was housed.

On 16 April 1907, we rode to Linga, and then arrived at the small convent Samde-Puk.

Close at hand at the foot of the mountain is the hermitage, *dupkang*, in which a hermit spends his days and years. It is built over a spring which bubbles up in the centre of the single room, a square apartment with each side five paces long. The walls are very thick, and are in one solid mass, unbroken by windows. The doorway is very low, and the wooden door is shut and locked; but that is not enough, so a wall of large blocks and smaller stones has been built before the door, and even the smallest interstices between them have been carefully filled up with pebbles. Not an inch of the door can be seen. But beside the entrance is a tiny tunnel through which the hermit's food can be pushed in. The amount of daylight which can penetrate through the long narrow loophole must be very small; and it does not shine in direct, for the front of the hut is shut in by a wall, forming a small court, which only the monk who brings the anchorite his daily ration may enter. A small chimney rises from the flat roof, for the hermit may make himself tea every sixth day, and for this purpose some sticks of firewood are pushed through the loophole twice in the month. Through the chimney, too, a feeble light may

fall, and by means of these two vents the air is renewed in the cell.

'What is the name of the lama who is now walled up in this cell?' I asked.

'He has no name, and even if we knew it we do not utter it. We call him merely the Lama Rinpoche.' (According to Koppen, *lama* means one who has no one over him; and *rinpoche* means gem, jewel, holiness.)

'Where has he come from?'

'He was born in Ngor in Naktsang.'

'How long has he lived in the darkness?'

'It is now three years since he went in.'

'And how long will he remain there?'

'Until he dies.'

'May he never come out again into the daylight before his death?'

'No; he has taken the strictest of all oaths, namely, the sacred vow only to leave the cell as a corpse.'

'How old is he?'

'We do not know his age, but he looked about forty.'

'But what happens if he is ill? Cannot he get help?'

'No; he may never speak to another human being. If he falls ill he must wait patiently till he is better again or dies.'

'You never know, then, how he is?'

'Not before his death. A bowl of *tsamba* is pushed every day into the opening, and a piece of tea and a piece of butter every sixth day; this he takes at night, and puts back the empty bowl to be filled for the next meal. When we find the bowl untouched in the opening, we know that the immured man is unwell. If he has not touched the *tsamba* the

next day our fears increase; and if six days pass and the food is not taken, we conclude he is dead and break open the entrance.'

'Has that ever happened?'

'Yes; three years ago a lama died, who had spent twelve years in there, and fifteen years ago one died who had lived forty years in solitude and entered the darkness at the age of twenty. No doubt the Bombo has heard in Tong of the lama who lived in the hermitage of the monastery Lung-ganden-gompa for sixty-nine years, completely shut off from the world and the light of day.'

'But is it not possible that the prisoner may speak to the monk who pushes the *tsamba* dish into the loophole? There is no witness present to see that all is correct.'

'That could never happen and is not allowed,' answered my informant with a smile, 'for the monk outside would be eternally damned were he to set his mouth to the loophole and try to talk to the recluse, and the latter would break the charm if he spoke from within. If the man in there were to speak now, the three years he has passed there already would not be put down to his credit, and he would not like that. If, however, a lama in Linga or Samde-Puk falls ill, he may write his complaint and a request for the anchorite's intercession on a piece of paper, which is placed in the *tsamba* bowl and pushed into the opening. Then the recluse prays for the sick man, and if the latter has faith in the power of prayer, and holds no unseemly conversation in the meantime, the intercession of the Lama Rinpoche takes effect after two days and the patient gets well again. On the other hand, the recluse never makes any communication in writing.'

'We are now only a couple of paces from him. Does he not hear what we are saying, or, at least, that someone is talking outside his den?'

'No, the sound of our voices cannot reach him, the walls are too thick; and even if it were the case, he would not notice it, for he is buried

in contemplation. He no longer belongs to this world; he probably crouches day and night in a corner, repeating prayers he knows by heart, or reading in the holy books he has with him.'

'Then he must have enough light to read by?'

'Yes, a small butter lamp stands on a shelf before two images, and its light suffices him. When the lamp goes out it is pitch-dark inside.'

Filled with strange thoughts, I took leave of the monk and went slowly down the path which the recluse had only passed along once in his life.

Poor, nameless, unknown to anyone, he came to Linga, where he had heard a cave-dwelling stood vacant, and informed the monks that he had taken the vow to enter for ever into darkness. When his last day in this world of vanity dawned, all the monks of Linga followed him in deep silence, with the solemnity of a funeral, to his grave in the cave, and the door was closed on him for the rest of his life. I could picture to myself the remarkable procession, the monks in their red frocks, silent and grave, bending their bodies forward and turning their eyes to the ground, and walking slowly step by step as though they would let the victim enjoy the sun and light as long as possible. Were they inspired with admiration of his tremendous fortitude, compared with which everything I can conceive, even dangers infallibly leading to death, seems to me insignificant. For, as far as I can judge, less fortitude is required when a hero, like Hirose, blockades the entrance of Port Arthur, knowing that the batteries above will annihilate him than to allow oneself to be buried alive in the darkness for forty or sixty years. In the former case the suffering is short, the glory eternal; in the latter the victim is as unknown after death as in his lifetime, and the torture is endless, and can only be borne by a patience of which we can have no conception.

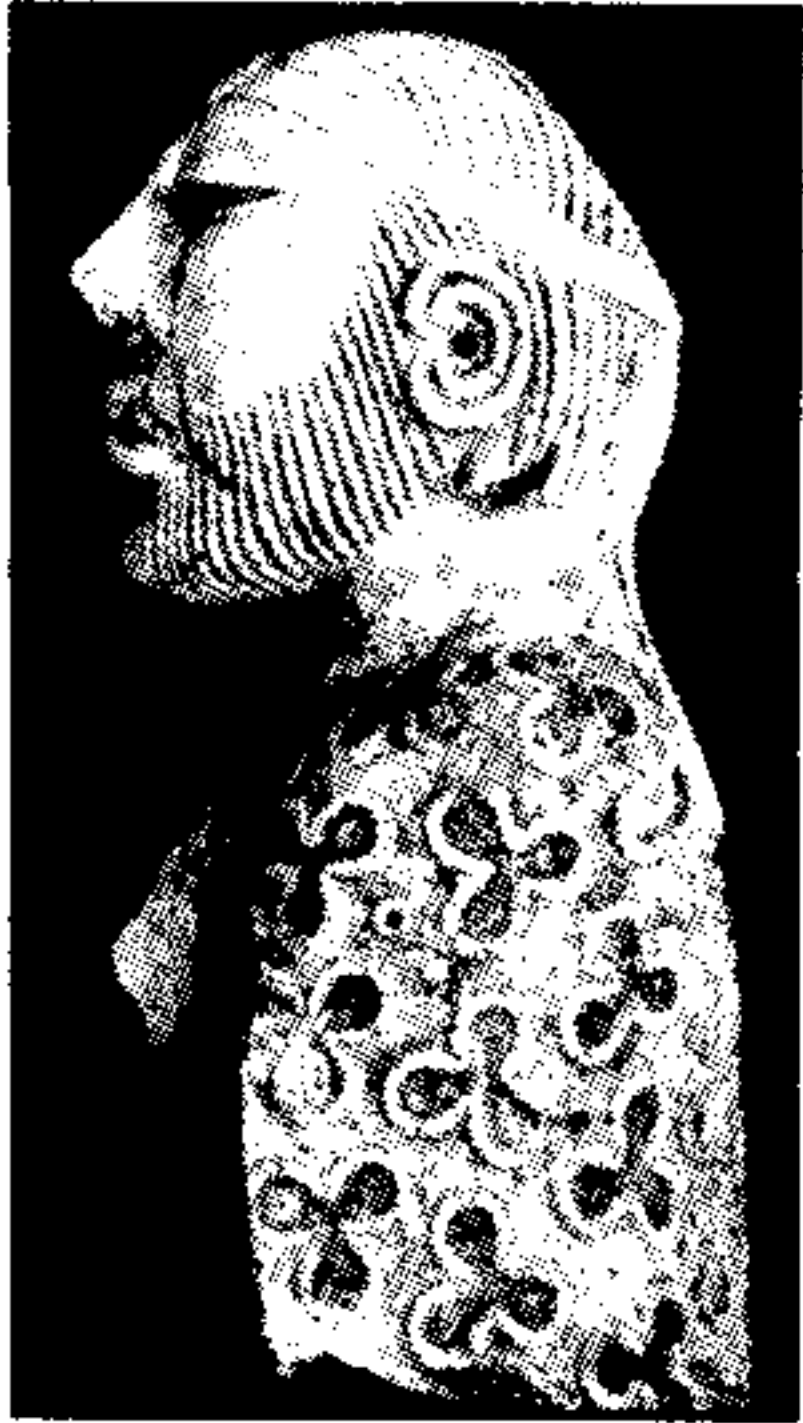
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Indus Valley Civilization

SWAMI HARSHANANDA

A renowned scholar, Srimat Swami Harshanandaji Maharaj is President, Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore. The swamiji has a number of inspiring and informative books on Hinduism, youth development, etc to his credit. In this excellent article, Swami Harshanandaji gives us a fresh picture of the oldest civilization on earth.

During the middle of the 19th century, when two engineers, who were in charge of



Statuette of a bearded man: Mohenjo Daro

constructing a railway line, got the mounds at Harappa (now in Pakistan) dug for obtaining burnt bricks to be used as ballast, little did they know that they were digging up a past and a hitherto unknown facet of the history of India. But that was a great, even exciting, discovery.

Suspecting the existence of the remnants of an ancient civilization, systematic excavations were undertaken in 1921-22 by the Archaeological Department of India. These excavations led to the detection of a proto-historic city, now called 'Harappa'.

Further excavations over the next few decades in about 80 sites all over India revealed some more prehistoric cultures and civilizations. However, almost all the cultures cognate to the discoveries at Harappa were concentrated in the Sind, Baluchistan and Punjab areas, now in Pakistan, while a few were found in Gujarat and Rajasthan also.

By far the most extensively researched findings are at Harappa and Mohenjo Daro (both in Pakistan now). The other sites studied are at Kalibangan (Rajasthan), Lothal, Rangpur (both in Gujarat), Bahawalpur Chanhudaro, Amri, Ali Murad, Pandi Wahi, Dabarkot

and Quetta (all in Pakistan now).

The archaeological finds at various levels or depths have been assigned to different periods of history, the oldest being 4000 BC and the most recent one, 2200 BC.

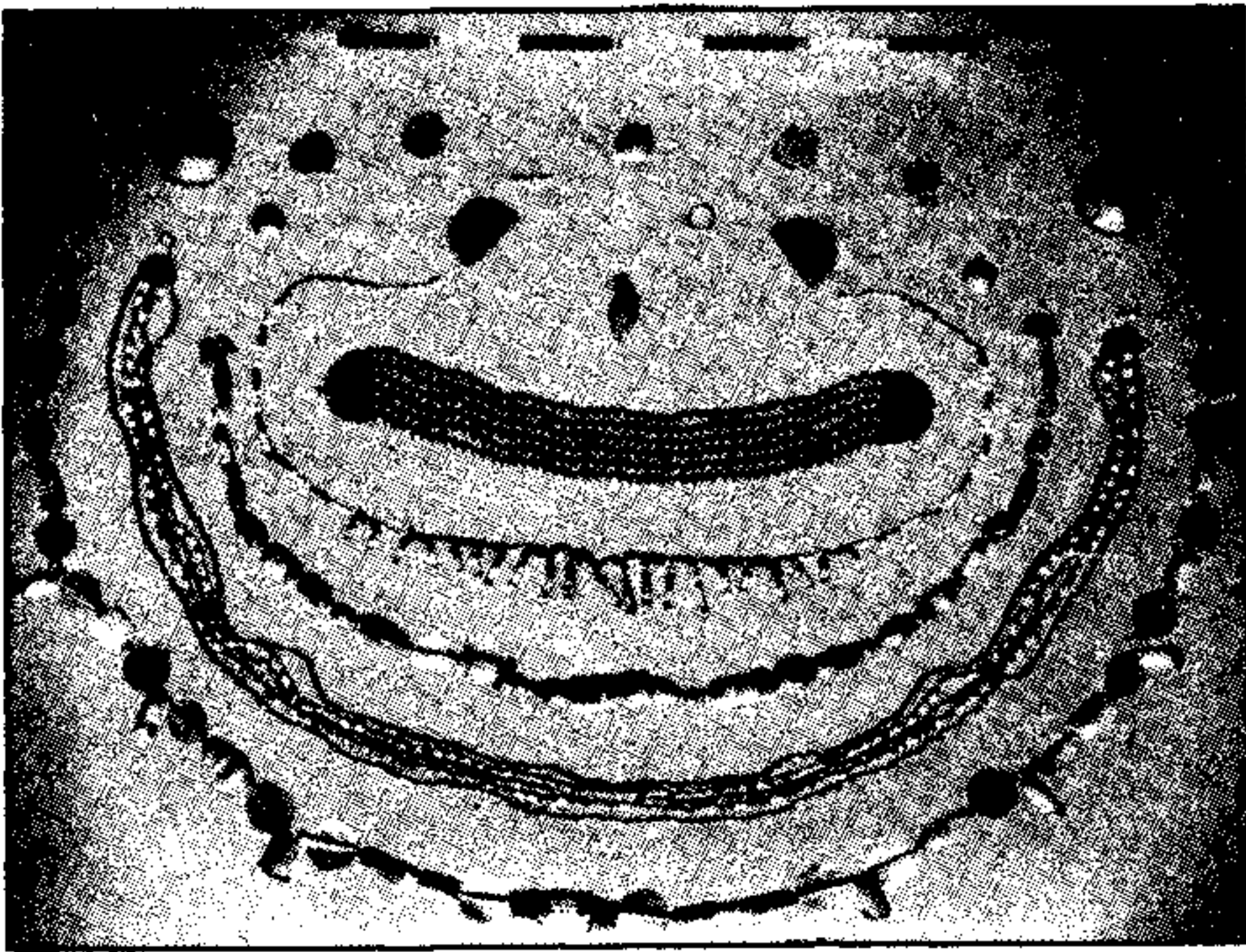
As regards the nature of this civilization and culture, several conjectures have been made as to whether it was pre-Aryan and pre-Vedic called Dravidian, mostly by the European scholars. These scholars opine that this civilization was destroyed by the invading Aryans around 1500 BC. However, researches based on the various findings have revealed that Harappan culture and those of other allied sites were a continuation of the Vedic culture, perhaps a later phase, and that the Aryans were an indigenous people who had always lived in the Indo-Gangetic plains.

The disappearance of the Harappan civilization might have taken place due to the drying up of the Saraswati river, disturbance of the ecological balance, and severe climatic changes resulting in a great famine, probably during the period between 2200 and 1900 BC.

The Harappa town was a square of



Seal depicting Shiva



Necklaces from Mohenjo Daro

about 1.5 km (0.9 mile) on each side, and stood on 4.8 km (3 miles) of land. It was laid out in a grid pattern of streets. The houses were built of burnt bricks, whose dimensions conformed strictly to the *Kashyapa Samhita* (viz, 11.75" x 5.25" x 7.5" and two more sizes). The houses had only one main door for entrance, fixed in the side lanes. There were courtyards inside. Windows opened to the streets. Small houses had just two rooms whereas the bigger ones could have even twenty-five rooms. Bathrooms, latrines and sanitary arrangements were very good. Apart from bricks and mortar, wood was generously used, not only for construction purposes but also for a wide range of furniture, like cots, chairs, stools, tables and easy chairs. Firewood and charcoal were in use in the domestic stoves. Rooms

were often set apart for the purpose of worship.

Roads were straight and were maintained well. Special chambers had been constructed for the collection and disposal of garbage.

One of the most striking features of the Harappa town was its big granary or warehouse. There were 12 granaries arranged in two parallel rows, with proper arrangements for ventilation and passages of approach. There were also grain millers built on brick platforms where wooden pestles were used for crushing the grains.

Mohenjo Daro ('the mound of the dead') is situated on the west bank of the Indus river, about 600 km (375 miles) to the south-west of Harappa.

This site, better preserved, is larger than Harappa. The layout is strikingly similar to that of Harappa.

The chief attraction of this site is what is now called 'The Great Bath'. It is built of brick set in gypsum mortar with a damp-proof course of bitumen. The dimensions are: 54 by 33 metres (180 by 108 ft). The outer walls are massive, 2 to 2.5 metres (7-8 ft) in thickness. In the centre there is an open paved quadrangle, with verandas on four sides. At the back of the verandas are galleries and rooms. In the centre of the paved quadrangles is a large swimming bath 11.8 by 7 metres (39 by 23 ft), which is lined by finely dressed brick laid in gypsum

mortar covered with bitumen. There are steps leading down to a low platform for the convenience of the bathers. Arrangements for some kind of steam-bath are also found.

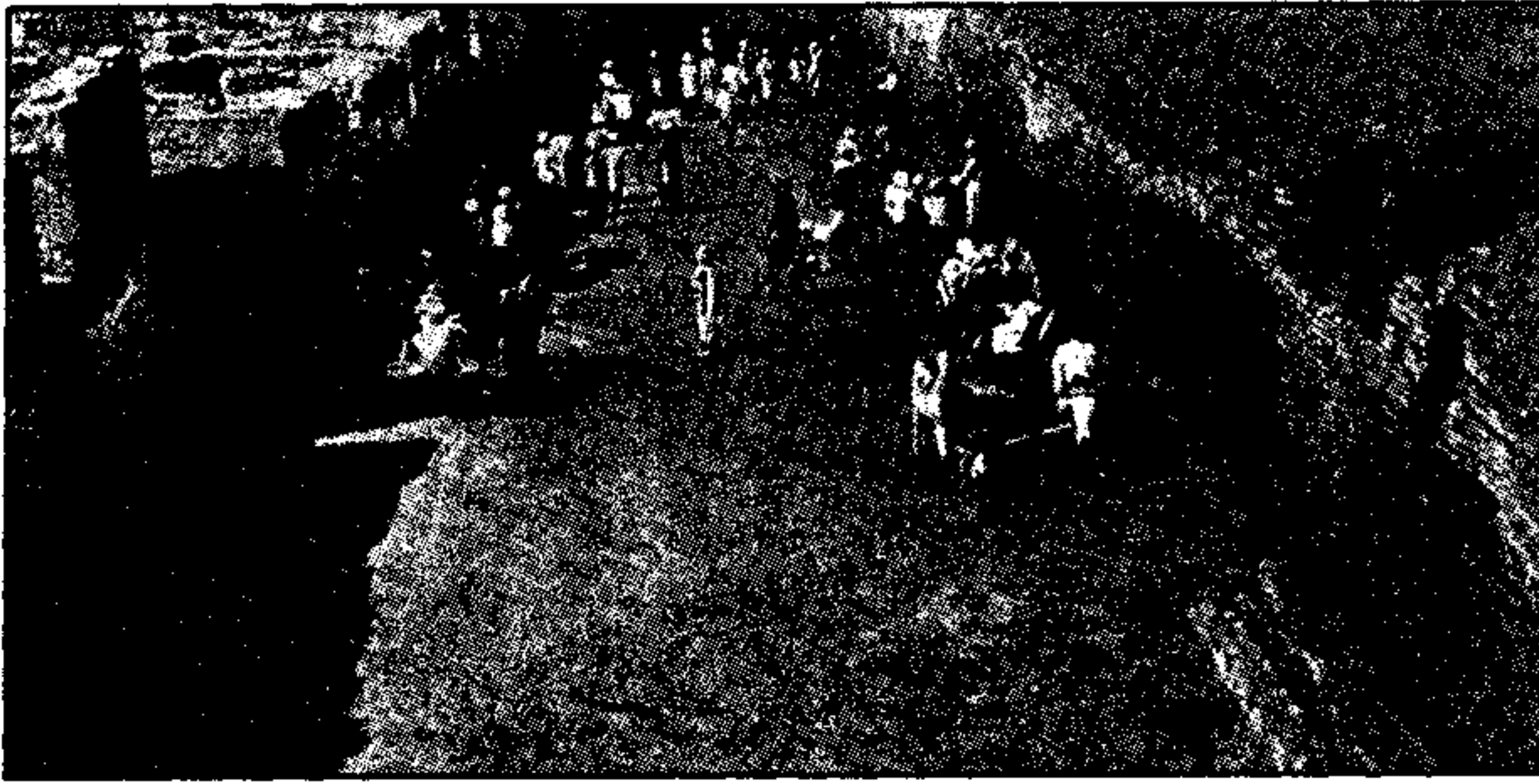
The following are some features common to all the sites of the Indus Valley civilization.

This civilization was more ancient and comprehensive than the ones of Egypt, Sumeria, Assyria and Mesopotamia.

People were mostly vege-



The Great Bath, Mohenjo Daro



A Model of a Mohenjo Daro Street

tarians and consumed fish also. Apart from wheat, barley and rice they grew several varieties of fruits and vegetables also, like pumpkin, dates and coconuts. They wore clothes made out of cotton, jute and fibres. Several varieties of dressing hair were common among the women. The ornaments used were girdles, ear-rings, bangles, necklaces, nose-rings, anklets, hairpins, and beads. Turbans and head-dresses were used by women too.

The use of metals like gold, silver, lead, tin, copper, nickel, bronze, etc as also many precious stones like diamonds, rubies, emeralds, topaz, was well-known to them. Razors for shaving and highly polished mirrors were made out of these metals.

Soldiers used such weapons as bows and arrows, spears, axes, maces, catapults, and slings.

Weights and measures had been standardized. One scale discovered in the ruins has very accurate markings.

Trade and commerce by land and by sea were flourishing. Contacts had been well established with Sumeria, Babylonia, and Egypt for trade and commerce.

The people were good at arts and crafts also, as can be surmised through the various well-finished toys unearthed from the ruins.

Chanhudaro town was famous for this.

Music and dancing were also known to the ancients. Stringed instruments resembling a lute (*vina*), cymbals, drums (*mridanga*), etc were in use, as can be guessed through their figures on the seals found.

Pots and jars with various drawings and paintings have been recovered from the sites.

Various traditional Indian games like dice, played in modern times, were known to them and were popular too.

As regards the disposal of the dead, the methods of cremation, burial as also leaving the bodies to be eaten up by birds and animals, seem to have existed. Bodies of babies and little children were generally interred in pots and then buried.

One enigmatic aspect of the Indus Valley civilization is the script discovered on the various seals. All attempts over the last few decades by eminent paleographers to decipher them have not yielded much results. Whether the seals were amulets containing some mantras, or whether what is written is some kind of the earliest form of Brahmi script, it is very difficult to say.

Coming to religious beliefs, worship of Shiva-Pashupati, Goddess Durga, lingas and certain animals and trees like bison, fish, serpent, holy basil, and peepal, seem to have existed.

In conclusion, it may be said that the Indus Valley civilization and culture represents the later phase of the Rig Vedic culture and there is no clinching evidence to support the other views that have been hazarded by the European scholars based on insufficient evidence or wrong assumptions. □



A boat: from Harappa

Universal Message of the *Bhagavadgita*

DR P. C. ALEXANDER

Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj visited Mumbai in February this year for the first time since assuming office as President of the Ramakrishna Order. On 10 February 2001, a function was arranged at the Raj Bhavan to felicitate him. The second volume of Revered Maharaj's book, The Universal Message of the Bhagavadgita, was also released on the occasion. The Governor of Maharashtra, Dr P.C. Alexander, gave an excellent extempore lecture that day. We publish select portions of that speech.

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to offer felicitations to Poojya Swami Ranganathanandaji on the occasion of his first visit to Mumbai after assuming responsibilities as the head of the Ramakrishna Mission. India has produced some very eminent scholars whose intellect can match the best anywhere in the world. India has also produced some great giants in spirituality, but there are only very few people who can combine the strength of the intellect with that of spirituality. Poojya Swamiji is one of these rare people.

My wife and I have the privilege of having known Swamiji for several years and receiving his affection in abundance. A meeting with him is a blessing, reading his books is real education and listening to his speeches is indeed an intellectual and spiritual experience. With his vast erudition, deep knowledge of the philosophies of the East and the West, his sympathetic understanding of all religions and his catholicity of outlook, I will unhesitatingly describe him as one of the greatest interpreters of Sanatana Dharma since the time of Swami Vivekananda.

When I read the two volumes by Swamiji on *The Universal Message of the Bhagavadgita* and particularly noticed the fact that these were extempore lectures delivered over a period of two years to audiences assembled at Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, I was amazed at the versatility and richness of his knowledge, the sweep of his spiritual experience and his extraordinary capacity to reach the minds

of the common people.

Next to the Bible the *Bhagavadgita* is the most translated and the most commented upon book in the world. The *Gita* has been published in 75 languages and in each language there have been several publications. According to the statistics of five years ago, there have been 70 publications of the *Gita* in Tamil, 150 in Telugu, 132 in Marathi, 384 in Bengali, 25 in French, 28 in German and 270 in English. Since then there have been several more translations and commentaries on the *Gita*. According to one estimate there are about 2000 translations and commentaries in various languages of the world today. Some of the great masterminds of our country such as Sankara, Jnaneswar, Ramanuja, Madhva, Vallabha, Tilak, Aurobindo, Gandhiji, Radhakrishnan, Rajagopalachari and Vinoba Bhave have given authoritative commentaries on the *Gita*. There are several references to the great book and illuminating interpretations of its *slokas* in the speeches of Swami Vivekananda also.

The *Gita* and the Vedas

While these masterminds have given authoritative commentaries on the *Gita*, the unfortunate fact is that several others who lack even elementary knowledge of religion and philosophy, leave alone spiritual knowledge and experience, have also been giving their own commentaries.

The *Bhagavadgita* is not an easy book to be understood by the ordinary reader. It is a syn-

thesis of the teachings contained in the Vedas and it is obvious that it can be interpreted properly only by those who have good knowledge of the Vedas and the Upanishads and the basic tenets of Hindu religion and philosophy. Those who try to give their commentary and interpretation without such knowledge are really doing a disservice to their listeners.

Lord Krishna, who delivered the message of the *Gita* to Arjuna, was undoubtedly the greatest master of Vedanta and was therefore fully qualified to do so. He had to do it in very unusual and difficult circumstances. Arjuna was experiencing utter confusion in his mind as to what his duty was in the situation he was facing. The mind of Arjuna, who was expected to be the chief leader of the Pandava forces arrayed in the battlefield against the army of the Kauravas was then 'immersed in the ocean of sorrow and delusion.' He was confessing to

his charioteer and mentor Krishna that his limbs were failing him, his mouth was parched up and he was shivering all over his body. Even his bow, the famous Gandiva, was slipping from his hand, and he felt that his hair

was standing on end and his skin was burning. He saw no good in killing his own people in battle and he had declared that he desired neither victory nor empire nor even pleasure. This extraordinary situation could be tackled only by the strength of the Vedas and by 'the greatest preacher of the Vedas that ever ex-

isted,' as Swami Vivekananda described Lord Krishna.

Just as the greatest preacher of the Vedas was the most qualified to deliver so profound a message as the *Gita* to Arjuna, Swami Ranganathanandaji is equally qualified to give an authentic interpretation of the *Gita*, as he is one of the great masterminds of our times whose intellect and spirituality are deeply rooted in the Vedas and the Upanishads.

The *Gita* is Not a Vindication of War

A serious problem arises when Arjuna is overcome by confusion and doubts in the battlefield, and then Lord

Krishna takes on himself the task of convincing the reluctant warrior that war has become his duty and that if he didn't fight that war he would be deviating from his righteous duty and incurring sin. All those who have gone to



Sri Krishna teaching Arjuna: A sketch by Swami Aptananda

war in the long history of wars everywhere in the world have always claimed their intentions and objectives as right and just. Even those who conquered the territories of the defenceless and the weak who had given no provocation for war, had claimed that they were doing so in the interests of justice and peace. Some had even claimed that they were acting in the interests of the conquered people themselves when they occupied their territory. But the Mahabharata war stands out clearly as the only one in either history or in literature as justified fully on the grounds of righteousness and justice.

The *Gita* was thus not an exhortation for war but an exhortation for doing one's duty. Lord Krishna, the great master of the Vedas, had to take Arjuna step by step to the final stage of realization that escaping from one's duty was the real sin and not waging war in vindication of righteousness. When Arjuna realized this great truth he had no reservation in his mind in doing what he saw clearly as his duty. The *Gita* was justifying war not in all circumstances, but only when it had become an unavoidable duty.

Universality of the Message of the *Gita*

Even though the message of the *Gita* was given by Lord Krishna to his friend in a state of mental confusion at the battlefield, it was not intended only to resolve the doubts in Arjuna's mind about the righteousness of going to war against his own kith and kin. On the other hand, it was intended to be a message for all humanity and also valid for all times. The answer given to one question leads to another question and, eventually, all answers lead to the resolving of the doubts about going to war in Arjuna's mind. More importantly, they lead to the most authentic enunciation of Sanatana Dharma for the benefit of all humanity.

Why was Arjuna chosen for receiving such a profound message? Swami Ranganathanandaji gives one explanation quoting Sankara, and that is that spiritual ideas spread when they are understood and practised by men and women of more than ordinary good

qualities. Arjuna was no doubt a man of extraordinary good qualities and an excellent pupil who could understand and assimilate the great wisdom that was being imparted to him. As pointed out by Swami Ranganathanandaji, the student and the teacher were both remarkable personalities. 'The *Gita* is a heroic message from a heroic teacher to a heroic pupil,' says Swami Ranganathanandaji. 'Its universality makes it applicable to any human being anywhere in the world to make him or her realize one's fullest human personality.'

If Lord Krishna had given Arjuna just the message he needed for resolving his immediate problem, the *Gita* would not have emerged as the universal message. It was because it covered all the issues relevant to the life of human beings that the *Gita* became the universal message.

Action and Renunciation

The great importance which the *Gita* assigns to action or work has been specially emphasized in Swami Ranganathanandaji's commentary. Swamiji points out the fact that the entire *Gita* deals with men and women at work, unlike other spiritual books which treat man or woman centred in prayer, meditation, worship or some ritual or ceremony. In the *Gita* the central theme is how a person engaged in any kind of work can achieve spiritual development and fulfilment. Of course, the definition of work given by Lord Krishna is an exacting one which may be found to be difficult by ordinary people to follow. The profound doctrine of work which Lord Krishna lays down is that man's right is to work only, but never to the fruits thereof. He says that one should not be motivated to work expecting to enjoy the fruits of work. At the same time Krishna says that one should not be attached to inaction either. On the face of it, this may appear to be a very impossible proposition, impossible for ordinary people to accept. But when one looks deeper into its meaning, one finds that what this doctrine of action emphasizes is only the need for caring for others and sharing the fruits of one's la-

bour with others.

Swami Ranganathanandaji reminds his listeners that the *Gita* is a practical philosophy and not a book of piety. Most people who do not understand the main thrust of the *Gita* read it as a pious act or as a help to meditation. But the *Gita* is presented by Swamiji as the greatest book of practical Vedanta, and a comprehensive philosophy of life and work.

Swami Vivekananda explains this doctrine of primacy of action clearly when he says: 'Do not try to become a saint before you become a man.' Man is not expected to run away from his duties as a member of society by any religion. Swami Vivekananda further explains the importance of performing one's duties with compassion and love to his fellow human beings when he asserts that he does not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth. This may appear to be too harsh a language for a sannyasin to use, but he was using such strong words to show how service prompted by unselfishness, compassion and love is the essence of true religion.

The Purpose of Incarnation

One of the most important contributions of the *Gita* is that it gives the most authoritative explanation of the purpose of incarnation. No other literature of the Hindu religion has made the purpose of incarnation so clear as the *Gita* has. Lord Krishna tells Arjuna that whenever there is decline of dharma and rise of adharma,

God incarnates himself.

The main difference between the Hindu religion and a religion like mine, Christianity, is that Christianity believes that the incarnation of God as man is a once and forever event and its purpose was completed with the life and mission of Jesus Christ. For the Christians, the life and teachings of Jesus remain eternally valid as the source of inspiration and guidance for man's life on earth, and he does not have to look forward to anymore event of God becoming man. But in Hinduism there is no full stop to God's revelation to human beings. The *Gita* gives the assurance that God will incarnate himself whenever there is need for the establishment of dharma.

This raises the question as to why God should take human form to establish dharma. The only answer can be that it is because of God's love for human beings. A caring and loving God will not remain indifferent watching dharma declining and adharma increasing, and hence the assurance to humanity through Arjuna that God will come into being age after age when there is need for it.

To conclude, I wish to convey to Swamiji the deep indebtedness in which he has placed his readers by explaining the *Gita* in practical terms and in a simple manner that can be understood by ordinary people. The subtitle of the book, *An Exposition of the Gita in the Light of Modern Thought and Modern Needs*, is indeed apt and fully justified. □

Swami Vivekananda on Sri Krishna

He is the most rounded man I know of, wonderfully developed equally in brain and heart and hand. Every moment [of his life] is alive with activity, either as a gentleman, warrior, minister, or something else. ... He is the first man, way before Buddha, to open the door of religion to every caste. That wonderful mind! That tremendously active life! ... Krishna preached in the midst of the battlefield. 'He who in the midst of intense activity finds himself in the greatest calmness, and in the greatest peace finds intense activity, that is the greatest [Yogi as well as the wisest man].' It means nothing to this man—the flying of missiles about him. Calm and sedate he goes on discussing the problems of life and death.

'What's Your Opinion?'

Prabuddha Bharata conducted a sample survey to know what the youth of some countries feel about Indian religion and spirituality. Here are the responses, to be published in two instalments.

What are your ideas about Indian religion and spirituality?

ALIA GURTOV

Portland, USA

Indian religions, and especially Vedanta, are among the most devotional practices in the West now. While attending some spiritual classes with my mother, I have often thought that the disciples may get bogged down in the details of religion. However, they never cease to devote their energy to meditation and the pursuit of enlightenment. A real love for God seems to be the root of Vedanta unlike most religions practised in the US.

BITAN BHATTACHARYA

Dhaka, Bangladesh

India is such a country as has been sanctified and glorified by a number of highly enlightened spiritual scholars, whose doctrines are exclusively concerned with the divinity within oneself. What I believe about Indian spirituality is that it is absolutely scientific and is meant for all, irrespective of sect, nationality, or sex.

CARLOS JAVIER D'ANGELO

Buenos Aires, Argentina

I think Hindu religion and spirituality are ways to conceive and explain the existence of God, the ultimate Truth, from different views, and comprising many methods of approaching such a Reality. To me the most amazing fact is that it does not matter how many opinions there may be about a special subject, nor does it matter which path in Hindu philosophy you may follow. The result will be the same, say their scriptures, provided you are a sincere seeker of God. All will eventually reach the same goal. Regarding this point Sri

Ramakrishna is a strong and clear example. He made no differences with regard to social origin, nationality or religious beliefs. He emphasized only one thing: the spiritual aspirant must develop a deep yearning for God. And here again I come to the idea I like most: the universal and manifold conception of approaching Reality, because people are of different temperaments and, accordingly, for each seeker of God there is a way to realize Him.

CLAIRE GOODAL

England, UK

My ideas about Indian religion and spirituality are that, they teach that there are many ways to God and many paths to follow, depending upon your nature. They also teach that there are many saints, teachers and avatars. To learn from them about how they live their lives, and even to be able to be in their presence and experience their love is a great thing. Indian religion also teaches the principle of Atman and not just this mind, body, emotions, and senses. It also teaches that this life and world are not the only lasting realities.

DANA SUGU

Romania

The word 'religion' can't be used by itself: it is always followed by a question: 'Which religion?' From this point the separation begins: Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, etc. The highest form of religion drops the 'name and form', dealing only with the Spirit. Spirituality begins here. Religion, in the strict sense of the term, is a system of belief and worship, and builds walls between differ-

ent beliefs, between nations and, ultimately, between individuals. In a larger sense, it is the eternal aspiration of the human soul for unfoldment, a search for identity, freedom and peace. And this is the place where spirituality begins. Spirituality therefore comes as a protest against ceremonials, creeds, orthodoxy, and divisions, removing all external coverings and keeping only the essence, the Spirit, which undoubtedly lies as the substratum of all religious faiths. The Indian religious system seems to be more open to dropping its external shape of creed or dogma, unlike the orthodox religions of Christianity and Islam.

The Vedas established dharma, the law, that holds the moral and ethical values and points towards the supreme goal of human beings, which is liberation. This dharma is something which is expected to be practised throughout one's life and it includes everything: virtue, morality, religion. The highest form of dharma is spirituality. The four aims of existence of any human being, the *purushārthas*, are all based on this dharma. Trying to attain anyone of them should not disobey the dharma. Therefore in India religion is a part of everyday life, according to each one's priority for any of these *purushārthas*.

Even in an immature stage this dharma is followed due to superstition or the fear of consequences, emphasized so much in the scriptures. Later, on attaining some maturity this very fear is turned into real understanding and faith and, gradually, by reaching higher levels of consciousness, the values and priorities change by themselves. So dharma is the journey towards perfection, a journey which starts from the very day of one's life and ends only on the last day of one's departure from the body, and not only a thought sent on Sundays towards Divinity while attending a religious ceremony.

In ancient India students would go to the guru, a dispeller of darkness or nescience, in order to study. At the very beginning they were asked to memorize many things, without even knowing the meaning of them. Nowa-

days children are taken to temples by their parents. They do not understand why or what's going on there but they do whatever they are told to do, or just copy what their parents are doing. When one is initiated there might not be any understanding of the mantra given by the guru, but one is asked to repeat it. All these are done because one is told to do so and through their practise comes the understanding and the rejection of 'the lower for a higher Truth,' as Swami Vivekananda would say.

Beside any religious sect in India one can always find a philosophical system ready to support it. That's why it seems that the faith is always supported by reason and therefore may be easily accepted. A faith coming out of reason and intellectual understanding is not easily shaken and therefore helps those interested in a spiritual life to progress. It seems that a faith established on reason does not have a way back but leads certainly towards the supreme Truth.

I dare say that the most important contribution made by Indian thought to the world's wisdom is its Advaita philosophy. Advaita stands for the purest spirituality, where there's nothing else than one, pure Consciousness. That's why the human being is considered potentially divine, unlike in the Christian religion where sin is emphasized on humankind. This concept, having at its base the underlying pure Consciousness, gives to humanity a special stature from the very beginning. A potential divinity at any moment, ready to reveal its real nature, gives to human beings the hope and the strength necessary for the effort one should make in order to let this divinity manifest itself. From the Advaita's concept of unity originates thus the very concept of 'service of the human being is service to God,' emphasized by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

In the 'Advaita Prakarana' of Gaudapada's *Mandukya Karika*, it is said: 'The dualists, confirmed believers in the methodologies establishing their own conclusions, are quar-

reling with one another. But this Advaitic view has no conflict with them.' Sankara comments on this verse, saying: 'As one is not at conflict with one's own hands and feet, so also this Advaitic view of ours consisting in seeing the same Self in everyone, is not opposed to them.'

So Advaitic spiritual ideas can be assimilated in any culture, any religion, without creating any conflict with any creed or thought-system, for anything else is included in it.

ILSE MARIA LEIDECKER

Buchen, Germany

Indian religion and spirituality have a deep-rooted tradition. They teach harmony and tolerance, and can give real guidance for the searching of God or our own identity.

JULIANO CERCI

Curitiba, Brazil

The East has always exercised a fascination over me. Specially so with India—for her culture, myths and legends, and also for the great masters who lived there.

Religion and spirituality together represent the India I can only admire and respect. After all, if she is so ancient and at the same time modern, she could only be important. I do not adore Christianity in particular because of all the things that have happened as shown historically and by the attitudes of the institution itself. Due to this I cannot be considered to be a Christian. Maybe it is intolerance on my part. Even then, what I think is more important is that I love and admire Jesus Christ. That does not prevent me from being a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Because, after all, what I love in these beings is their divinity and the God they represent.

Indian religious tradition and spirituality are very rich and comforting. They are intense yet flexible and unbreakable. They orient us and help us to grow and turn into something marvellous: by their peculiar beauty, by being intriguing, by constantly evolving and being unique, by not judging us but indicating mistakes with compassion and pity, by knowing our faults and yet accepting us; by being fair, humble and intense.

This religion is complete not just for showing us the path to divinity but also for teaching us how to live in the best possible way. Not just a religion, but a way of life. However, I do not think it is perfect. Because, I believe that religion and spirituality are very personal, subjective issues and never could follow an exact formula for all people. Therefore I believe there will never be a perfect religion. But even then, Indian religion and spirituality represent an excellent and extremely legitimate way and approach.

The Indian religious tradition and her spirituality are very rich and very comforting.

KENICHIRO TOYOFUKU

Tokyo, Japan

Each country has advanced in a particular field. For example, the USA is an advanced nation so far as financial business is concerned, and Japan is advanced in the manufacturing of cars and household electrical appliances. From this point of view, I recognize India to be an advanced nation in religion and spirituality. And with the importance of religion or spirituality increasing from now on, I think the religion of India can correspond with the religion of the world.

NAVARATNASAMY KARTHIKEYAN

Colombo, Sri Lanka

Indian religion or Sanatana Dharma (nowadays widely known as Hindu Dharma) is the oldest religion in the world. Results of scientific analyses conducted at different ancient sites take its existence back to several thousand years. The Vedas are the basic scriptures of Hindu Dharma. Dating back to 6,000 years or more, the Vedas are the oldest books in the world. The Vedas are the most ancient spiritual legacy of humanity. From the Vedic scriptures, one can estimate and find that the Hindu tradition has been flowing continuously for several million years. Only the absolute truth can prevail: it is not affected by the passage of time.

Hindu Dharma was not founded by a single prophet, or at a particular period of human history. It was not based on any par-

particular historical revelation: the message given to/by a particular person at a particular time and place. It is a timeless religion. It is a revealed religion. Its spiritual teachings are built upon a strong foundation of verifiable spiritual experiences of thousands of saints and sages.

The depth, richness and diversity of Hindu Dharma make it a universal religion. It embraces the aspiration towards the Divine by all creatures, not only human beings but also plants and animals and creatures of the subtle world. It explains each and every event in the universe. It provides us with practices that enable us to discover the Truth for ourselves, rather than telling us what Truth is supposed to be. It directs us towards our own spiritual practices. It sets Self-realization as the true goal of our lives and provides clear guidance to achieve that goal. Hinduism allows the Divine to be worshipped in any name or form or even beyond form. It shows us ways to face worldly problems and also to get rid of all sufferings. It gives the code of conduct for everybody, both at the individual level as well as the social level. It tells us about food, health,

education, governance, construction, management, business, etc. It presents the art of living for individuals, and also about family structure, social structure, culture, etc. It is Hindu Dharma that agrees with the well-established scientific facts. Hindu Dharma shows the path for unity in diversity. It emphasizes the equality of all living beings.

ONG KAY JIN

Singapore

In Indian religion and spirituality, there is no room for the word called 'religion'. That is, it is not a teaching or practice that is based on dogmas and superstitions. Indian religion and spirituality so called conventionally are beyond all such beliefs. It is the universal 'Truth'. One Truth, without a second. Its philosophy is unsurpassed, yet it is easy to practise for all individuals. The philosophy of Indian religion can be said to be tailor-made for each individual according to his/her own spiritual evolution, educational standard, race and capacity. No matter who we are, whatever creed we uphold, whatever race we may be born in, the universal truth of Indian spirituality has no barrier.

What do people of your country in general think about Indian religion and spirituality?

ALIA GURTOV, USA

Unfortunately, I have to admit that most Americans see other westerners practising Hinduism, or Vedanta, and immediately think they are 'New-Agers'. There is very little respect for the more devotional religions, often seen as impractical but sought merely for a new experience. Americans have a hard time devoting themselves to a faith, and therefore cannot understand the willingness of some to truly love their God. Much of this has to do with our distrust in anything requiring faith without solid proof. One may wonder how we continue to function as a country. ... If we had a more open mind towards new ideas, Americans, and other Europeans, could benefit

much from the ideas of Ramakrishna, Sarada, and Vivekananda, mainly their teachings that dissociate the body and mind from the soul. Often we are caught up in this maya, and without the teachings of Vedanta, we cannot see that Reality is in ourselves, and not in the illusion around us.

BITAN BHATTACHARYA, Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a country where 40% of the people are educated, and it is mostly inhabited by Muslims. Some of them have avoiding attitudes towards Indian religion and are reluctant to accept the Vedantic ideas because they fail to distinguish between the Vedantic ideas and the mythological aspects of Hinduism. There are some who are tolerant

of other religious views and are somewhat convinced of the universality of Indian spirituality.

CARLOS JAVIER D'ANGELO, *Argentina*

In my country, Argentina, very few people know about Hindu religion or spirituality as they really are. Most people have wrong ideas about them. The information they can get through TV programmes or other means of communication is related with the activities of the Dalai Lama and his relationship with artistes pertaining to the show business. Most frequently, our people believe Buddhism is practised in India. Some people believe that Hindu religion is hatha yoga or is a sect following a guru or a saint. But they know practically nothing about rituals, spiritual practices, or Hindu philosophy. Neither do they know about your sacred books or Vedanta.

CLAIRE GOODAL, *UK*

I don't think my friends, family and work colleagues know very much about Indian religion and spirituality, though some have mentioned the strong Indian family values and how they are close, and how they look after one another and the elderly relatives. Some people associate yoga posture and meditation with Indian spirituality. Seeing some of the Hindu forms of God has been a little confusing, as they are not of a human form and people don't know what they mean. Some friends who are following a spiritual path have received guidance from teachers, books, centres and scriptures from India at some point of their lives, and some have embraced it as their way; or, the Indian spiritual tradition has helped them in their own religion and path.

DANA SUGU, *Romania*

Generally speaking, our people are not aware of Indian religion and spirituality. Attempts have been made by different Romanians to introduce to Romanian readers books on this topic. In 1930, Mircea Eliade, a very well-known encyclopaedic personality in the religious field, came to Calcutta from our country and studied with Prof Surendranath

Dasgupta. On his return, he published many articles and some books, but soon they were withdrawn from the market by the communists, for any book related to India, they considered, had something to do with God, who for them was non-existent. To the communists, it is just polluting peoples' minds with superstitions.

Later, after the 1990s other books have been published and this has two sides. The market was at the very beginning full of books on tantra, written by so-called tantric gurus, who instead of promoting information, were only misleading people. As a result, some readers lost confidence in the credibility of these books and other books dealing with Indian spiritual thoughts.

Besides, a very important part is being played by the Romanian Orthodox Church in denigrating any attempt at introducing any spiritual tradition different from its own. As a reaction to the Church's efforts at rejecting any new spiritual idea, the readers, not being ready to follow any new type of totalitarian ideas, became more interested in them. There is an interest among the young Romanians in Indian spirituality, mostly yoga and meditation. Swami Vivekananda's four yogas have been published and re-published many times. The translations of *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, and *Prashna Upanishads*, *Atmabodha*, etc, and modern books like *The Way to God* by Swami Lokeswarananda, and *The Sermon on the Mount According to Vedanta* by Swami Prabhavananda became out of print very soon after they were published. This shows that there is interest and there should be more attempts at introducing reliable ideas related to Indian spirituality.

ILSE MARIA LEIDECKER, *Germany*

Very few people in my country understand the vastness of Indian philosophical and religious traditions.

JULIANO CERCI, *Brazil*

Eastern religions are on the rise in Brazil. This could reflect a dissatisfaction with our own western religions. The declining numbers

of adherents of the Catholic Church in Brazil are pretty much intense. At the same time, our people have an incredible capacity to mix various religions and produce their own with the characteristics of various belief systems. A Brazilian can go to a Catholic Church in the morning, later visit a *umbanda* ('sacred ground' in African Religion), and at 6:30 pm, go to meditate in a temple. That is how a Brazilian is: someone who believes in everything, yet in nothing, who wants to experience a little of everything and decide on his own what or what not to follow.

KENICHIRO TOYOFUKU, Japan

In Japan, it is well known that Buddhism has come from India. On the other hand, the media of Japan tends to broadcast only the mystical content in Indian religion. Moreover, the disreputable leader of a new religion is introducing Indian religion. So, in Japan, there are a few people who are afraid to discuss Indian religion because they feel it is related with a new religion of such disrepute in our country. Because of such reasons, the general Japanese does not understand Indian religion correctly, and recognizes it to be a mystical religion. Therefore the exact knowledge of the religion is required. This activity should pay attention not to insist on forms and externals, but emphasize theoretical and scientific explanations.

ONG KAY JIN, Singapore

Evidently not many people really know and understand about Indian religion and

spirituality in general. There are a lot of misunderstandings and misconceptions. Some common misconceptions and views are that Indian religion and spirituality—categorized only as 'Hinduism'—is animistic, crude. A very common opinion is that it has multiple gods, some beings like demons; that the religion concentrates only on rituals, hardly sharing any dharma; that this religion only concentrates on and concerns itself with the Indian race, and that other races are not welcome. This is because Singapore lacks true Indian spiritual teachers to share and teach Indian philosophy as it is. Visiting swamis, however, conduct talks and workshops periodically; but that is not enough. We hope to have more true swamis in Singapore to share the truth about Sanatana Dharma.

NAVARATNASAMY KARTHIKEYAN, Sri Lanka

In general, Sri Lankans highly respect Indian religious and spiritual traditions. They consider India to be a spiritual homeland. Many Buddhists and Hindus undertake pilgrimage to India and many more people wish to do so. They believe that visiting holy places in India would purify them and elevate them spiritually. Indian religion is the one which provides shelter to all other traditions and people belonging to different faiths. It is because of Indian religion that a vast number of ethnic groups were able to live together, relatively with few problems.

(to be concluded next month)

Self-Surrender

No one is too low to be accepted by the Lord. ... The greatest mistake we commit is that, on the path to the Lord, we create so many hillocks of desire on which we pause to rest, even though if we have once surrendered ourselves. The Lord comes more than half-way to blast those hurdles with His grace. Let not the sadhaka think that he cannot realize God because he lacks this or that quality or virtue. God cannot be purchased by any quality or virtue that there may be in mortal man. Sadhana is not the price of His compassion. Sadhana is meant only to rid us of our forgetfulness in regard to God, and to awaken in us the sole aspiration to return to Him. Such aspiration...is only a kindling of the feeling of kinship with God, which can take place in any circumstances.

—selected from *A Saint's Call to Mankind*

A Saga of Service

Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal, celebrated its centenary in June this year. Here is the story how this centre grew from nothing into a huge institution.



The rent of the two-room hospital was three rupees. The founder, Swami Kalyanananda (see photo), begged his food, served patients all through the day and even at night. A small box containing medicines, a few instruments which could be put into a handbag, etc were all that the hospital had. This was how the hospital at the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal, was when it was started in June 1901.

This gigantic centre of service to the suffering celebrated its centenary in June this year. Its story is an engaging read.

Hardwar has been a centre for spiritual practices since ages. Down the centuries, thousands of monks and nuns have lived austere lives in its precincts. Though it's all a township today, a century ago it was a remote, silent corner of India. There were hardly any facilities there, let alone a hospital. Monks (who comprised the main chunk of the population) would suffer from ill-health and, for want care, die painful deaths.

Seeing their pitable condition, Swami Vivekananda asked his disciple Kalyanananda to serve them. Not knowing where help would come from, Kalyanananda embarked upon a hospital project. He went to Kankhal with a few rupees in hand. For monks to work in those days meant something horrible. A monk was to sit and study and meditate. To serve others wasn't his forte. So people called names. 'Scavenger monks,' remarked traditionalists. But who cared? Kalyanananda was not one who feared. He began his work in all earnest.

During his very first year of service in the 'hospital' we described above, he had treated six monks as in-patients and some 50 out-patients. Slowly help began to arrive. A monk and a brahmacharin arrived to assist him. Then came another lieutenant of Swamiji, Swami Nischayananda. Nischayananda would walk 15 long miles (plus 15 to return) every day to treat patients in Rishikesh. Later still, a noble gentleman came forward to help these all-suffering monks of Ramakrishna by donating a few *bighas* of land for their hospital. This came as a boon. Kalyanananda immediately embarked upon a project of building some huts so that patients could be provided with 'rooms'. Money too began to trickle in. A modest building came up after some years. Today there stands a majestic 122-bed hospital!

Apart from providing medicines to the ill, Kalyanananda would himself arrange for the cremation of dead bodies, and beg from door to door to provide food, clothing, etc to the poor. Local harijans, living sub-human lives then, discovered gods in these monks, as the monks helped them in every way. Swamiji envisaged a new order of monks who would sacrifice their own lives for the sake of the lowest of the lowly. His disciples followed his advice to the letter.

Nischayananda remained in this service for as long as 34 years till his death in 1934. Kalyanananda remained there for almost an equal number of years, serving the suffering day and night. But since his health began to fail, he was compelled to quit towards the end of his glorious life. He stayed at Mayavati for some time, and was later shifted by force to Mussourie for treatment. He passed away in 1937. □

RELIGION AND LIFE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.

A poor man has no wealth; a monk also has no wealth. In spite of this similarity, why are they worlds apart?

The difference lies here: a poor person laments because he is poor while a monk doesn't. In Śaṅkara's *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi*, we find this statement:

*Sahanam sarva-duḥkhānām
apratikāra-pūrvakam;
Cintā-vilāpa-rahitaṁ
sā titikṣā nigadyate.*

To not only endure all the distress with calmness and equanimity, but to do that without lamenting is the way. Why? So that the mind is not agitated. To endure with calmness all the adversities, be it of the nature of extreme weather conditions—terrible summer heat, intense cold—or blows from society by way of blame or fame. But when you are compelled to endure because you cannot protest, this is not endurance (*titikṣā*).

Maharaj, what is sadāvrata?

Sadāvrata means a charitable institution, an institution where charity is being done continually. An institution having arrangements to offer food, drink, clothing, etc to monks and nuns is known as *sadāvrata*.

Mahendranath Gupta, M., who is the chronicler of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, wrote this great work from memory after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away. Is this true? Again, are the numerous stories in the

Purāṇas true?

Mahendranath Gupta has described his personal experiences in that work.

The central theme of the Purāṇas is Self-knowledge. This theme has been expressed in diverse ways, through innumerable stories. Sri Ramakrishna too has narrated numerous parables. You see, for instance, whether there was a war between Rama and Ravana is for the historians to decide. According to the Purāṇas, the question is not whether Rama or Ravana were genuine characters. But the fact is, the common masses can understand terse philosophical truths more easily through the medium of stories and anecdotes than through philosophical argumentation. The aim of the stories of *Hitopadeśa*, for instance, is to instruct us about higher truths. The Purāṇas also follow the same tradition. These stories are superficial and outer embellishments. But to know what the core truths are becomes difficult. All these become useless unless we experience things ourselves. These are means for us and using these means we should know the end.

The Upaniṣads question: 'How was this universe created?' Just as an earthen pot is made of a lump of earth, and just as a piece of iron is used to make a sword, this universe is created. And just as a spark is non-different from the fire, so is this universe non-different from the Truth and will merge in It.

The Purāṇas say through stories that this world has been created. Who has seen this

creation process? Was this universe there before creation also? All these, however, are not the end but only a means to knowing the Truth. This universe has been created from Him, will remain in Him, and merge finally into Him. Just like an earthen pot has been made out of earth and will become earth again, so is the case with everything. In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* there is a statement [3.14.3]: '*Sarvam khalu idaṁ brahma, tajjalān iti śānta upāsita.*' This whole universe is Brahman. It has come out of Brahman, it will live in It, and will be dissolved in It. So making the senses calm, one should meditate on Brahman.

Which vow of Śrī Kṛṣṇa was broken because of Bhīṣma?

Śrī Kṛṣṇa had vowed to refrain from using any weapons in the battle of Kurukṣetra. He was the charioteer of Arjuna. But Bhīṣma was hurling weapons with such ferocity that Arjuna sustained bruises all over his body, his horses were hurt, and the wheels of the chariot came loose causing injuries to Śrī Kṛṣṇa even. In no way could Arjuna cope with the severity of the assault. Such is the prowess of the devotee that he even challenges God to prove his might. Bhīṣma began to harass Arjuna by shooting arrows with such speed and force that Śrī Kṛṣṇa could not tolerate anymore. He had taken a vow that he would not touch any weapon during the battle; but he was forced to take up the loosened wheel of a chariot in his hands as a weapon.

Greatly agitated, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is coming towards Bhīṣma with a wheel in hand in order to kill him. And Bhīṣma has thrown out both hands wide, and has put his chest forward in anticipation of Kṛṣṇa. What a great hero Bhīṣma is! What a great devotee he is!

The sages of old were all great yogis. But still, why were they so angry?

That was their drawback. Consider Sage Dūrvāsa. He was easily angered and would curse easily. Such anger, however, did little

good to these yogis. Amongst human beings there are both Dūrvāsas and Vāsiṣṭhas. Would you like to become Dūrvāsa or Vāsiṣṭha? Be firm on whom you wish to follow. In this world there is both good and bad. Choose one.

Were they liberated after such long and hard austerities?

Who wants liberation? Even if they were offered liberation, they would not accept that.

Maharaj, what is the meaning of the phrase, 'He is the awakener of consciousness'?

Human beings are conscious, and He is the controller of human beings. So He is the awakener of consciousness.

Why is Sri Ramakrishna called 'avatāra-variṣṭha', the greatest of avatars?

God is One and indivisible. When He comes down as avatar, he comes with that much power necessary to solve the problems that society is suffering from. The whole of His power and glory are not essential.

When Sri Ramakrishna came, society had innumerable problems. The power that manifested in order to solve all of them was something which was not seen in any other avatar. So he is called the greatest of avatars, *avatāra-variṣṭha*, from one angle. From one more angle, Sri Ramakrishna's ideals have spread everywhere; such a thing was not observed in other instances. The way Sri Ramakrishna's ideals and ideas spread all the world over in such a short period and the specialities of these ideals made Swamiji remark that Sri Ramakrishna is the greatest of avatars.

It has been said that Brahman is real, and the world too is real. In what sense is this true?

This world is unreal as it is, but as Brahman, it is real.

—Compiled by *Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar*

From Morality to Moksha

Freedom in the *Mahabharata*

PROF SITANSU S. CHAKRAVARTI

Prof Chakravarti was formerly visiting professor, Visvabharati, Santiniketan. In this scholarly article, he discusses several aspects of morality from the Mahabharata viewpoint. Some ideas contained in this article were presented at the department of philosophy, University of Toronto, in 1994, at an international philosophy conference at Utkal University in 1999, and also at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata.

We are not going to define the words 'freedom' or 'bondage'. We take for granted that their meanings are understood, and propose to build our discussion on the basis of that. Freedom is taken as the antithesis of confinement, signifying openness to choice that satisfies. I remember having seen kids in North America carrying huge glasses of soft drink in public, bearing the caption: 'Freedom of Choice'. The choice of words here is quite significant. In today's society what often goes in the name of freedom is drinking, and indulging in all kinds of pleasures. This way of 'freedom' is exemplified in a 'happy' lot of people, 'free' from the clutches of traditional 'bondage' of ideas and practice.

Does this correspond to our understanding of the word 'freedom'? Many of us say no. For the concept of freedom is associated with the concepts of satisfaction (*santosh*), harmony (*samatva*) and peace (*shanti*), which seem to be prominently missing in the form of life depicted. Indeed, the life-pattern above is replete, the world over, with consumerism, addiction, and violence, negating the quality of life we seek after.

Here we are inevitably drawn to the realm of ethics. The question naturally stares us in the face: Is *freedom* to be reduced to the concept of freedom of choice, or is there a firmer holding ground for it, so that humans are not at the beck and call of each and every choice they are taught to cultivate in today's

technological society with the help of the mass propaganda machinery it has perfected? The *Mahabharata* seems to have something definite to say in this regard.

In ethics, choice *per se* is not absolute. It is circumscribed by the concepts of the rightness and the goodness of actions. An action is right or proper only if it is according to *dharma*. *Dharma* is the justification for the ethical duties. We turn to the *Mahabharata* for insights into it.

Dharma: The Two Senses

In the Hindu system there are four aims of action. These are *dharma* (righteousness, justice), *artha* (wealth, money), *kama* (desire, pleasure) and *moksha* (salvation, freedom).

Kama is the urge for satisfaction of desires,¹ which must be pursued to an extent only for one to transcend to a greater spiritual height. Everybody has to follow his/her own nature, and desires are too true to be ignored.

Artha, or wealth, is an aim of action only derivatively, not directly. It wields a tremendous power on our lives. It is indispensable towards attainment of the other ends also, for *dharma* and *moksha*. For, an excess of earning is conducive to their pursuit, as in the case of building a temple or performing a sacrifice, which helps both *dharma* and *moksha*.

In ethics the consideration of *dharma* comes after that of *artha* and *kama*, for it is

1. *Mahabharata*, 3.33.30.

mainly in relation to them that its significance is to be found in everyday life. It is not only in a situation of conflict of interests—either one's own incongruous interests, or those of several individuals—that *dharma* has a role to play. It is quite relevant to, and rather indispensable for, the pursuit of sensuous pleasure itself, for the logic of pleasure demands the guidance of *dharma* for its attainment. Thus, pleasure needs to be circumscribed by *dharma*. Similar considerations hold true of wealth, too.²

The word '*dharma*' has been used in two senses in the *Mahabharata*. One is of specific actions or sequences thereof, like sharing of wealth with others, performing sacrifice and austerities, and studying the scriptures.³ These may be termed *act dharmas*, ie, actions regulatory of pursuits of both sensual desires and wealth. These actions correspond to the broadly ethico-religious prescriptions in communities, diverse as they are, aimed at utilitarian considerations, and those of social justice as well as considerations of the individual's transcendence of the confines of narrow selfishness. Performed in the right spirit, they contribute to a balance in society, and its consequent prosperity.

Laudable as the actions are, they are not strictly ethical if not done in the proper spirit. 'Austerity *per se* is not with any fault,' says the *Mahabharata*, 'nor are studying the scriptures, following the injunctions of the Vedas and earning money with all effort. All of them, however, are affected with fault when not associated with the proper spirit.'⁴ Again,

Carrying a stick, maintaining the vow of silence, donning matted hair as well as bark and hide, or having a shaved head, following strict control of sex, attending to the holy fire, living in the seclusion of the forest, and drying the body up through fasting—all this is false if the

spirit is not pure.⁵

Thus all actions may turn defective when associated with a motive of 'showing off'. The ritual of sharing one's wealth with others may, under certain circumstances, become a meaningless practice, if not a harmful form of nepotism. All *dharmaic* actions must be guided by a higher principle if they are to pass the test of morality. It is not only the codes of *dharma* mentioned above but also pleasure and wealth that are to be pursued according to these principles.⁶

Four virtues have been mentioned as the principles of *dharma*. They are truth, forgiveness, sympathy for others and non-attachment. Each of the four principles is a necessary and sufficient condition for the rest. Truth, for instance, manifests itself in forgiveness, and forgiveness itself is truth. Similar conditions can be shown to hold for the other three. Unlike the four codes of *dharma*, however, the four principles exist without defects,⁷ insofar as they are attitudes and not actions. These may be termed *attitude dharmas*.

Actions may be performed rudely, with audacity, or with an ulterior self-seeking motive in mind. From an ethical perspective, these associated attitudes would constitute the defects of the actions concerned, as we have seen already. The attitudes of forgiveness, sympathy and others, however, may not be contaminated with any of the defective attitudes mentioned above. We have to keep in mind that it is not forgiveness as an act performed, say, in the court of law, that we are talking about here. An act may certainly be associated with the blemishes mentioned. We are concerned here with the mental *attitude* of forgiveness, which is closely connected with *ahimsa* or non-violence. Forgiveness as an act, performed with a declaration like 'You are pardoned,' may take effect even when mixed with a show of pride, or a gesture of rudeness.

2. 'One seeking pleasure and wealth should follow *dharma* to start with.' *Mahabharata*, 5.134.37.

3. *Mahabharata*, 5.35.56-7; 3.2.75-9.

4. *Mahabharata*, 1.1.275.

5. *Mahabharata*, 3.200.96-7.

6. *Mahabharata*, 13.111.18-9.

7. *Mahabharata*, 5.35.37; 3.2.76-7.

Forgiveness as an attitude, however, shuns such association. There may be gradations of achievement of forgiveness as an attitude through practice—a dimension absent in the case of the acts. One may make a gift of one's property, unfortunately with an unhappy show of rudeness, though it does not make much sense to say that the person concerned is in the process of (achieving the virtue of) making a specific gift, as a person may be said to be trying to inculcate the virtue of forgiveness. Making a gift is an act that may be performed irrespective of its moral quality or tone. There is little room for improvement in the act itself. It is either performed or not performed. The moral quality of the act, however, can be improved upon.

We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that performance of an appropriate action itself, in keeping with one's nature and capabilities, is also demanded by the morality of the situation. An act, nonetheless, and the attitude involved in performing it, have to be basically differentiated in order to understand the logic of the moral situation. Attitudes manifest themselves in actions. In them lies the moral tone of an action, as we have already seen. The appropriateness or otherwise of an action, however, constitutes the other dimension of morality. It is an answer to the question: 'Is this action proper? If not, which one is?' For the moral tone the question that would be in order is of the type: 'Is the action (which is appropriate for the occasion) performed in the moral way?' The appropriateness of a moral action is determined by the prosperity it generates for all creatures, through the maintenance of justice. The moral tone, which lies in the spirit in which the action is performed, not only ensures its proper and efficient performance but leads on to a state of total and absolute freedom and unconditional joy also. 'Wrong intention is the defect of *dharma*, hoarding of wealth, enjoyment for its own sake is the defect of desire. They, however, lead to prosperity when shorn of the faults.'⁸ Here the moral tone is evidently suggested as

generating prosperity out of actions, which, though proper for the occasions, do not lead to their utilitarian goal on their own. The moral tone is empty without actions, and actions are imperfect without it. It is in actions that the moral tone finds its expression; one on the way to perfecting the moral tone in life definitely suffers from the fault of non-performance if the relevant actions are skipped by any chance.⁹

Utilitarianism is a main ingredient of the ethical consideration of an action as indicated above, with the important proviso that (1) the satisfaction of all creatures, including human beings, is taken into account, and (2) it is circumscribed here by the moral tone of an action: in order (a) for the action to be perfectly effective towards the utilitarian goal, and (b) for it to lead to the higher goal of unconditional freedom. Freedom goes hand in hand with the attitudes which ensure the utilitarian goal. Says Shaunaka to Yudhishtira:

The ways of *dharma* are eightfold. They are: performing sacrifice and austerities, studying the scriptures, and sharing of wealth with others, truth, forgiveness, restraint and non-attachment (to the objects of the senses). Of these, the former four do not lead to freedom and release. As duties they should be performed without egotism. The latter four, however, lead us to the desired freedom, and are followed by the good all the time. They must be inculcated with the help of the eightfold paths only. The eightfold paths are: right determination, right restraint of the senses, right performance of austerities, right service to the teacher, right eating, right study, right quitting of work and right control of the mind.¹⁰

The four attitudes are the overriding factors in relation to the four acts. They can be cultivated by the practice of acts or their negations as indicated by the eightfold path. It is interesting to note the similarity that the eight-

8. *Mahabharata*, 12.123.10.

9. *Manu Samhita*, 11.44.

10. *Mahabharata*, 3.2.75-9.

fold path of Buddhism has with this one. If it is objected that there is a circularity here insofar as following the eightfold path involves an awareness of the four attitudes, the objection may be readily granted.

The attitudes at the level of the moral tone incorporate a mystic thrust at transformation of the total being, indicated specially by the *right control of the mind*, the last item of the eightfold path, which ensures freedom, as the concept is understood in the system. These attitudes are not to be equated with motives or intentions of actions. According to Kant, good will, ie, the right motive, constitutes the rightness of an action in a human situation, which is a situation of conflict of duty with impulse and desires. The right attitudes in our case, however, put an end to moral conflicts, when properly cultivated, for one achieves non-attachment to the objects of the senses through their pursuit. If non-attachment is achieved, how can there be conflict with desires for the objects of the senses?

The mystic dimension is not confined to the moral tone only of action. It extends to the moral appropriateness of the action insofar as utilitarianism at that level includes benefit to all beings, respect to all, and a holistic sense that does not alienate nature.

Truth

Truth may be taken either as an act of speaking (or writing) the truth, or as an attitude of truthfulness. In the former sense, it means reporting exactly what happened, and may have defects similar to the other acts specified earlier. The example of a defective act of truthfulness cited in the *Mahabharata* is about truthfully reporting to the robbers the whereabouts of a fugitive, which indicates lack of sympathy. Speaking the truth to earn fame indicates egotism.

As an attitude, truthfulness is a necessary and a sufficient condition for the other three attitudes, and comprises the moral tone behind truthful actions. Arjuna is ready to kill his elder brother when it is suggested that he get rid of his dear bow, following his vow to kill

anybody who makes such a suggestion. Sri Krishna, however, advises him to go by the spirit of the promise, and make unkind remarks of the brother instead, in the latter's presence, for to the brother, who is the king, such insult is as good as death.¹¹ 'Non-violence is the greatest virtue,' says Narada, 'forgiveness the utmost strength, self-knowledge the highest knowledge, nothing, however, surpasses truth. Although truth in words is by far preferable, that which is conducive to good, indeed, should be said. Truth, to my mind, is that which brings about great benefits to all living beings.'¹² Thus the spirit of truth may not be easy to decipher. 'Although truth in words is preferable,' Narada says at another place, 'the knowledge of real truth is rare.'¹³

Although real truth is indicated by the benefit it brings to all creatures, truth is not necessarily to be defined in this way. The state of benefit to all is accompanied by a total, holistic attainment in the subject. The wholeness, in most general terms, apart from the particularities in individual situations, has been brought to bear on the definition of truth. Bhishma tells Yudhishtira:

That which is changeless in and through the specific virtues of the various classes of people is truth. It is invariably the *dharma* of the honest and the upright. Truth is the eternal *dharma*, it is the only principle to abide by, it alone is the final end. ... Truth is God eternal ... everything is grounded in it.¹⁴

Cultivation of truth in this sense is, indeed, cultivation of an attitude not only of speaking the truth, but *being true* in a broader sense. Truth, the eternal, unchanging, can be attained only by the spiritual control of the mind, unopposed to any of the *dharmas*.¹⁵ Spiritual control of the mind does generate attitudinal changes. There are some specific

11. *Mahabharata*, 8.69.

12. *Mahabharata*, 12.329.12-3.

13. *Mahabharata*, 12.287.20.

14. *Mahabharata*, 12.162.3-5.

15. *Mahabharata*, 12.162.10.

attitudes, however, which the broad attitude of truthfulness manifests itself into, viz, justice based on harmony and equanimity, restraint, lack of jealousy, forgiveness, humility, steadfastness, perseverance, non-violence.¹⁶ Thus, *attitude dharma* is basically the general principle of truth, which expresses itself into other specific principles. The first principle of morality is not the categorical imperative, as in Kant, but the principle of truth in its most general form. It touches both dimensions of morality, viz, the appropriateness of an action as well as the moral tone. Following of truth brings about prosperity to all creatures, through a holistic process, which is the 'end in itself', to borrow the expression from Kant.¹⁷ The *kingdom of ends*¹⁸ here includes not only humans, but all living beings.

Morality, as we said, is not concerned with performing the appropriate actions alone but also is a journey towards freedom or *moksha*. The basis of morality is said to be freedom of choice for actions. This is the realm of the appropriateness or otherwise of an action in a situation. The state of freedom, however, which is the end of a moral action, is not to be equated with the freedom of choice. The state of freedom is a state of unconditionality that can be experienced through the cultivation of the virtues that constitute the moral tone of actions.¹⁹ It is a state of supreme satisfaction and joy,²⁰ a state of the highest truth. One can attain this state at any condition in life and

does not have to renounce the world for it.²¹ This state is not conditioned by the dictates of passions or desires. It is only after the satisfaction of desires that one is ready for it.²² This is a state of balance and equilibrium, of equanimity and justice to all.²³ It is this absolute freedom, ie, the phenomenology of the unconditionality of existence, that leaves its mark of authentic existence on human beings. Janaka, the emperor of Mithila, says: 'If Mithila burns down (with all its riches), I am not touched at all.'²⁴

Attainment of freedom sets one above the domain of the duties, insofar as this is a state of complete detachment from pleasure. One in this state of freedom does the 'right' thing not from a sense of duty, but as a matter of course. Thus, although morality is shaped by the cultivation of the four virtues, morality ceases to exist when the virtues have been thoroughly imbibed.

Conclusion

We have seen that morality has two facets: the appropriateness or otherwise of an action, and the way the action is performed. The ground for the appropriateness of an action is the broad utilitarian principle of satisfaction of all, including the non-humans. The grounds for the commendable moral tone of an action lead to freedom or *moksha*. Utilitarianism, however, is anchored to the principles insofar as they provide a sound basis for it, for cultivation of the virtues equips one for the practice of justice through sympathy and self-restraint. Truth, as we noticed above, can be defined in a way that includes the other virtues. Any voluntary action is a preparation for freedom or liberation, and is an occasion for the cultivation of the proper spirit. The agent's

16. *Mahabharata*, 12.162.8-9.

17. Immanuel Kant, *The Moral Law*, Chapter II.

18. Ibid. Cf. 'So act as if you were through your maxims a law-making member of a kingdom of ends.'

19. *Mahabharata*, 3.2.77. *Devayana* means the path that leads to freedom (cf. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 6.2.15; *Kausitaki Upanishad*, 1.3; *Bhagavadgita*, 8.26).

20. *Bhagavadgita*, 14.20. Also, 'That is the state of eternity.' *Mahabharata*, 5.44.30; 'Whoever knows that, attains eternity,' *ibid.*, 5.44.31; 12.187.30.

21. 'The student, the householder and the renunciate reach the final end on attending to their respective duties properly,' *Mahabharata*, 12.241.13; 12.326.26; 14.18.32; 12.320.50.

22. *Mahabharata*, 12.288.10.

23. *Mahabharata*, 14.51.39; 12.308.16.

24. *Mahabharata*, 12.178.2.

vision of freedom gives shape to the action he undertakes.

Freedom of choice thus does not stand on its own. It is connected with, and is circumscribed by, freedom in the other sense, viz, absolute freedom, which manifests itself in the cultivation of the moral tone. Freedom of choice, insofar as it pertains to the area of morality, may be said to be based on freedom in the other sense, for the latter provides its direction, via the associated attitudes, both at the level of choice of actions, as well as regarding their goal. The state of freedom is a basis for morality insofar as it is a necessary condition for self-transcendence. It is the unifying principle in moralities for different peoples and different cultures. Absolute freedom is innate. Taking a cue from Sankara's commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, 1.1.1, we may say that we are peripherally aware of being in the state of freedom, as the awareness lacks clarity. Indeed, the utilitarian considerations generate out of such awareness, however vague they be. So both the appropriateness of actions and their moral tone are grounded in absolute freedom. The degrees of morality are a gradual unfolding of the awareness of absolute freedom in an individual or a society. The innateness of freedom reminds us of the Chomskyan depth grammar, facilitating the learning process of the various surface languages. Here we have some universal moral and spiritual principles translating themselves into societal variances in moral or religious codes. The human *form of life* must be seen as incorporating the beckoning calls of freedom via attitudinal overtures, failing which the Wittgensteinian concept leaves us isolated in fragmented islands of morality and religion,

pertaining to the various societies.

Freedom being innate is present even when there is little freedom of choice. The question is: Can it be made overt, and more manifest, without the freedom of choice? The answer seems to be no. Enjoyment of freedom of choice, for all practical purposes, is a necessary condition for some awareness of absolute freedom for one lacking that. Freedom of choice, by no means, is the sufficient condition for overt awareness of absolute freedom. Some enhanced, overt awareness, however, of absolute freedom is the sufficient condition for harnessing and guiding it. The basic problem in today's world is that the concept of absolute freedom, which to my mind is a precious gift from the ancient India, is almost totally disregarded in our 'secular' academic world. As a result, freedom of choice suffers in either being about non-existent for the vast majority of the people who are literally brainwashed by the media and the politicians, or not being put to its proper use to the advantage of society even where it does exist.

Finally, freedom manifests itself in the *attitude dharmas* which are defined in terms of the former, insofar as they lead onto it, being its necessary and sufficient conditions. Freedom also ensures the performance of the *act dharmas* through our adherence to utilitarianism. There is no utilitarianism without a feeling for others, which originates out of a sense of freedom from confinement to one's own self. Thus freedom has its two arms—one pointing to the *attitude dharmas*, and the other to the *act dharmas*, via the former. Even the acts of morality that are performed on the basis of truth, and not utilitarian considerations, are based on the former. □

Ethical laws are the first steps leading to the heart's purification. This done, the Self begins to be realized. Morality is at the very foundation of all religions. It is not spirituality; but it leads to spirituality. A merely moral man can be unspiritual. But a spiritual man cannot be immoral.

—Swami Abhedananda

Reminiscences of Swami Vishuddhanandaji

SWAMI GOKULANANDA

Srimat Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj was the seventh President of the Ramakrishna Order of monks. He was a greatly revered monk, well known for his austere life and spiritual brilliance. Swami Gokulanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, had the privilege of associating with Vishuddhanandaji for some time. Here are his reminiscences.

I remember the day when I had the good fortune of meeting Swami Vishuddhanandaji for the first time. It was 1948. I was a college student then, and used to visit Belur Math frequently. I went to the Math that day. In those days, Srimat Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, the sixth President of the Ramakrishna Order, was staying in the room adjacent to Swami Vivekananda's room. After paying respects to President Maharaj, I came downstairs and met Swami Shraddhanandaji, his secretary. He asked me if I ever had the darshan of Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj, a disciple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and one of the Vice-Presidents of the Order then. I replied in the negative, and enquired where Vishuddhanandaji stayed. 'He is very much in this Math—just above my room. Go immediately and have his darshan,' said Shraddhanandaji.

I hurried upstairs. Swami Vishuddhanandaji had come to Belur Math from Ranchi and was staying in the room popularly known as Swami Subodhanandaji's room. When I went in, he was sitting on an easy chair facing the Ganges and reading *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (the original Bengali Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna). As I touched his feet, he asked me: 'Where do you come from? What's your name? What are you doing?' etc. I told him.

Then he asked: 'Have you read the *Kathamrita*? This is the 50th time I am reading these five volumes, but *Kathamrita* will never lose its freshness. You should read a portion of the

book daily, and should read it over and over again. Do you understand?' Later, he told me: 'Well, come again.' The very first meeting with him impressed me greatly. Even though I was a complete stranger, he showered such affection on me, and also planted in my young mind the desire to read the *Kathamrita*.

Soon I joined the Order. It was 3 July 1960. In the morning, I went to Swami Vishuddhanandaji. I carried a newspaper in which a review of the swamiji's *Sat Prasanga* (Vol. 2) had been published. I read out the review to him. He appreciated the language of the review. It had been raining since morning that day

and so the devotees from Calcutta couldn't come to have his darshan. As a result, I was fortunate enough to be alone in his holy company for an hour and a half.

I asked Swami Vishuddhanandaji: 'Maharaj, have you ever been to Kedarnath and Badrinath?' He said: 'No, I've not. I felt out of breath walking up and down the hills while staying in Mayavati. Going to Kedarnath and Badrinath would have involved much more strain. Do you know the mood I prefer? I prefer to sit quietly in one place, contemplat-



Swami Vishuddhanandaji

ing on God. That's why I have spent 25 long years at Ranchi. It is not really necessary that one should go places. Of course, it's natural to feel the desire to go on pilgrimages; this is necessary to get one's wings tired. In reality, everything is within yourself. There is a song: "Dive deep into your inner Self and you will get whatever you desire."

I asked him: 'Maharaj, have you ever spent your time in Uttarkashi, meditating in solitude?' Vishuddhanandaji replied: 'No, I have not. You can enjoy loneliness wherever you are by dint of firm practice and sincere devotion. You must maintain regularity in spiritual practices. You should be resolute in your habits. You will attain fulfilment if you can love Him with all your heart and soul. The task appears to be very difficult, no doubt. How can you love someone with all your heart and soul whom you have never seen at all? Here comes the question of past impressions (*saṁskāras*): power is transmitted from previous births. If you think in these lines, things will become easy.'

Vishuddhanandaji continued: 'Merely putting on the ochre robe of a monk will not do. First deserve, then desire. What do the scriptures tell us? The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* says that persons whose minds are drawn to the outside world do not desire to know the Atman: "*Parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūḥ tasmāt parāñ paśyati nāntarātman*."¹ God has created living beings with their senses facing outwards. So the *jīvas* observe all external objects keenly, but do not see the Atman

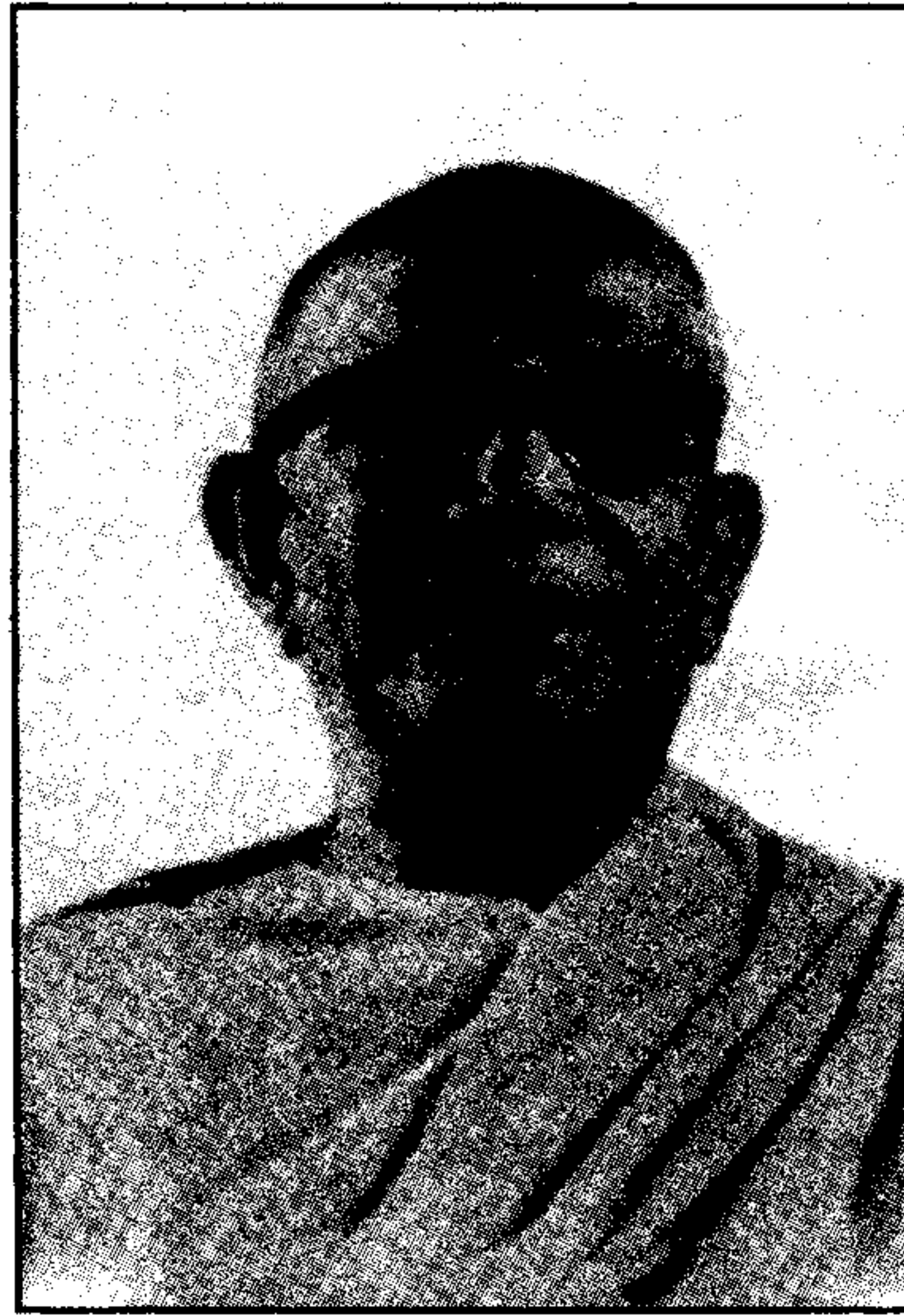
dwelling within." The same Upaniṣad further says: "The wise recognize life eternal, and do not seek the Eternal in non-eternal objects here: *Atha dhīrā amṛtatvaṁ veditvā dhruvam adhruveṣu iha na prārthayante*."² One must attain this immortal bliss. This desire is not a desire to be shunned. The desire for realizing God is not to be treated as a desire, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say. He gave this example: "...hinche greens are not to be counted as greens."³

I then asked Vishuddhanandaji: 'Maharaj, I've heard you used to meditate in front of Sri Ramakrishna's footwear on the second floor of the temple. How long would you meditate?' 'At least for two hours,' he replied serenely.

'What all work would you do when you joined the Order?' I asked him. He said: 'I, for instance, would cook for Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj. I had never cooked earlier in my life. I learned cooking from others, and started doing that. Maharaj, however, liked the food. Do you know why? I used to blend one thing while preparing food: *śraddhā*. I

did my work with great *śraddhā*. I didn't have the good fortune of seeing Sri Ramakrishna but got the satisfaction of having served his spiritual son, Swami Brahmanandaji. "He that hath seen me (the Son) hath seen the father."⁴

'Later, I had to cook while staying at the



Swami Vishuddhanandaji

1. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 2.1.1.

2. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 2.1.2.

3. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1989), p. 938.

4. *St John*, 14.9.

Varanasi Ashrama. At that time I spent one year in *tapasyā*. I used to devote much time for japa. On very hot summer days, I used to fan myself with my left hand and turned the rosary with the other. While in Ranchi, we had to undergo a lot of suffering in the beginning for procuring food. After all, one has to eat to live. I had to go to the city for giving classes.'

I told Vishuddhanandaji: 'Maharaj, this time, when you were leaving for Shillong, I observed the manner in which you offered pranams to Sri Ramakrishna. You entered the temple through the back door, poured a little Ganges water on your right palm from a container, sipped a little of it, and sprinkled the rest on your head. Then with folded hands you muttered something, standing before the image. You then fell prostrate before Sri Ramakrishna. Next, you got up, proceeded towards the altar, took a flower from there, touched it to your forehead and chest, tied it to your handkerchief, and then put it inside your shirt. Then again you prayed with folded hands, prostrated, and in the end, bowed down again, bending your knees. It was as if you were invoking strength from Sri Ramakrishna in order to give initiation to your disciples. That sight has left a deep impression on my mind.'

Hearing this, Vishuddhanandaji quipped: 'Oh, God! You seem to be in the CID! I hope you haven't discussed this with anyone! That's how I do it ... I shall hold on to this practice as long as possible. See the case of Virajanandaji, our President Maharaj! He is confined to his room owing to ill-health. Once I am confined to my bed due to ill-health, I shall not be able to continue my practice.'

I asked him: 'Maharaj, what do you say to Sri Ramakrishna when you offer pranams to him?' He replied: 'That's something special. It takes me about ten minutes to complete the process. It is like one of your "*bhāvas*" you were telling me the other day.'

Vishuddhanandaji was silent for some

time, and then said: 'Brahmo devotees are inclined to think of God's grandeur, but we think of His sweetness. We don't want the majestic attributes of God. A person is sitting on the throne, with royal robes on. Everybody is addressing him "My Lord." He has the power of rewarding and punishing. But his little son who is sitting near him only sees his affectionate father in him. Likewise, we dwell on the loving tenderness of God.'

After a little while, he said: 'Holy company, meditation, japa—all these are but knocking. Constant knocking is needed. "Ask and it shall be given you! Seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened."⁵

After some time, Vishuddhanandaji got up. While going, he said: 'You see, whenever you come to me, one or another devotee comes in and you have to leave. I feel sorry for you.

But don't think I am unmindful. I really feel for you. Today you had the grace of Sri Ramakrishna; I could talk to you for a long time.'

Swami Vishuddhanandaji was admitted to the Park Nursing Home, Calcutta, on 17 October 1960. On 18th he underwent an operation. I was at the Vidyamandira, Belur Math, then. I would visit him often since that day. I went to the hospital to see him on 2 November. I got the opportunity to massage his feet. He told me tenderly: 'You see, my days are numbered. But you have a long stretch ahead of you. If you can mould your life from now on, you will have nothing to worry. The agony of death is there, no doubt. But those who can build up their lives at an early age can fix their minds on God even when the end comes. That's the main thing.'

He said further: 'The outer comforts and pleasures are nothing. Real happiness is in the mind, in the constant contemplation on God. If one has sufficient spiritual practices—of prayer and meditation—to one's credit, he or

**'Real happiness
is in the mind,
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God.'**

5. *St Matthew*, 7.7.

she can maintain equilibrium in both happiness and sorrow. In my own case, it was as if I were seized by a ghost that made me run about everywhere to preach the holy names of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. I have a satisfaction that I have spent my life for his cause. Contrary to professional gurus, the guru and the chosen deity (*iṣṭa*) are the same to us. ... His work through me is over. So he has kept me in the present condition. I had to undergo cataract operations on both my eyes so that he could get his work done through me. Well, my part is over now. I understood long back, rather Sri Ramakrishna made me understand, that I had reached the last chapter of my life. I will meet the end the day my *prārabdha* (the karmic effects of the past) is over.'

Swami Vishuddhanandaji was discharged from the nursing home soon, and was put up at the Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta. I went to meet him there. He said with a smile: 'I am quite well now. And why not? I'm staying quietly and in peace in this room. But let me tell you, real peace is within. One can live in bliss and peace by diving deep within and getting immersed in Him.' He then called his secretary, Swami Chitsukhanandaji, and asked him to bring an item he had kept for me. When it was brought, Vishuddhanandaji handed it over to me and said: 'This is a piece of deerskin. This is my gift to you. Sit on it and practise japa and meditation.' I was overwhelmed.

Swami Vishuddhanandaji became President of the Ramakrishna Order in 1962. He began staying at Belur Math itself. One day, I went to have his darshan. He was sitting alone, and so I could discuss a little with him. I said: 'In the *Bhagavadgītā* (16.1-4), the Lord tells Arjuna: "Those who are born to a divine heritage possess sixteen virtues like fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and devotion, benevolence, control of the sense-organs, etc." Again in the 17th chapter, the Lord speaks of three kinds of austerity: physical,

oral, and mental. On the basis of all this I have prepared a chart. While retiring to bed at night, I scrutinize how far I have been able to observe these virtues.' Maharaj commented: 'That's good. But it would suffice if you followed the dictates of your conscience. The man who obeys the dictates of his conscience faithfully from his boyhood need not worry. Your conscience will tell you everything. It is this conscience which tells you "It's not good" when you are entertaining an evil thought or doing an evil deed.'

Vishuddhanandaji continued: 'Once, a small boy came to Belur Math with his parents. I asked him whether his mind warned him when he did something wrong. The boy said yes. This is the crux of the whole thing. In the path we have chosen, conscience is the only capital. Always remember that the voice of

conscience is the voice of God. If you follow this one principle, the rest will follow. Do nothing which your conscience will not approve. That's sufficient. Your life will then be automatically moulded in the right way. If you want to have the grace of Mother Kali, if you wish to realize God in your heart,

then you should follow the dictates of your conscience. There are two paths in life—attachment to worldly pleasures, and renunciation. Those who take to the path of renunciation must take the help of their conscience. Just see how unattached Ramprasad was even while leading a householder's life! You must also dive deep into the fathomless ocean of your heart. If you keep floating on the surface, how can you expect to get pearls?'

He asked me once: 'Do you keep a diary?' I said yes. I added: 'In my diary I have recorded details of the conversation I had with you on different dates. I have also noted down a verse you recited one day: "*Rāmakṛṣṇa rāmakṛṣṇa rāmakṛṣṇa pāhi mām; Rāmakṛṣṇa rāmakṛṣṇa rāmakṛṣṇa rakṣa mām.*"'

Swami Vishuddhanandaji said with a smile: 'I taught this to the barber of Belur

**'If you keep
floating on the
surface,
how can you expect
to get pearls?'**

Math.'

I had told Vishuddhanandaji that I would be visiting Kamarpukur and Jayrambati with some students of the Vidyamandira. He had said that I must not miss the village Dere where Sri Ramakrishna's parents originally came from. Later, I came and reported my experiences to him. He asked me which of the two—Kamarpukur or Jayrambati—I liked most. I said Jayrambati. He agreed: 'Let me tell you, my feeling too is the same. Whenever I happen to go that side, I stay longer in Jayrambati.'

I asked: 'Maharaj, if someone goes to Jayrambati and engages himself in japa and meditation in the solitude of Holy Mother's old house instead of going to far-off places like Uttarkashi, etc, will he have the vision of the chosen deity?' Vishuddhanandaji replied: 'Certainly he will. Is Jayrambati an ordinary place? Mother Jagadambā herself lived there for a pretty long time. Is that a small place? If God doesn't reveal Himself there, where else will He?'

Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj liked comparative mysticism immensely. He would read whichever book on this subject he could lay hands on. He told me one day: 'Siddheswarananda has sent me a book from Paris by name *The Way of the Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues his Way*. It's a very good book. You will be delighted to read it. Russia is known as a communist country. But this book bears testimony to the fact that even in such a country there were a number of genuine Christian saints. I have heard this story somewhere: One day, a Russian Christian went to the church and heard that St Paul had written these words: "Pray without ceasing." He thought initially, is ceaseless prayer possible? He thought later on, when St Paul says this, it must be possible. He then went in

search of a teacher and, wandering through several places of Siberia, came to his guru. By following his guru's instructions, he practised incessant japa and prayer and, thus, even in his sleep his japa continued. This shows that if we grow love for the name of God, we will have nothing to worry about. Those who get a realized soul as their guru can also reach such a state if they follow their guru's instructions with trust and conviction. It's said that all jackals howl alike. This too is like that.'

Vishuddhanandaji used to say: 'Never give up your firmness in religious practices. Always keep it up. There may be temporary interruptions due to certain special reasons, but you must revert back soon. Always bear in mind that without steadfastness you cannot realize the goal. Even if, under special circumstances, you fail to do japa and meditation at appointed hours, don't give up regularity. Devotion is a great thing.'

Vishuddhanandaji laid great emphasis on japa: 'Japa is essential for leading a life of piety. You must do it every day, with all sincerity. The *Gītā* says, "*Yajñānām japa-yajño'smi*, Amongst sacrifices I am the sacrifice of japa." The offering of japa is the best.'

Swami Vishuddhanandaji used to remind the monastics who came to meet him: 'You will never get a mould like Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji. If you cannot mould your life after them, it will be the greatest tragedy. You must attend to each item of work as God's work; otherwise, there will be the problem of ego. The more you keep Him in your thoughts, the more help you will get from Him in all your work. There are four fundamental things: truthfulness, purity, celibacy, and self-abnegation. God remains with such a devotee who possesses these qualities. Sri Ramakrishna comes and protects us if we live the life sincerely.' □

Try to live with those who have mastered the mind. If you cannot live with them, think of them. Mind controls mind.

—Swami Turiyananda

Historic 'Millennium' Conference

Brings senior Ramakrishna monks and devotees together in rural Michigan

FRANK PARLATO, JR.

Frank Parlato, Jr. is a journalist and researcher who is currently writing a book on the life of Swami Vivekananda. Here's his interesting report of a unique celebration in the history of Michigan, USA.

Ganges, Michigan, USA. Some 108 years after Swami Vivekananda came to Chicago and introduced

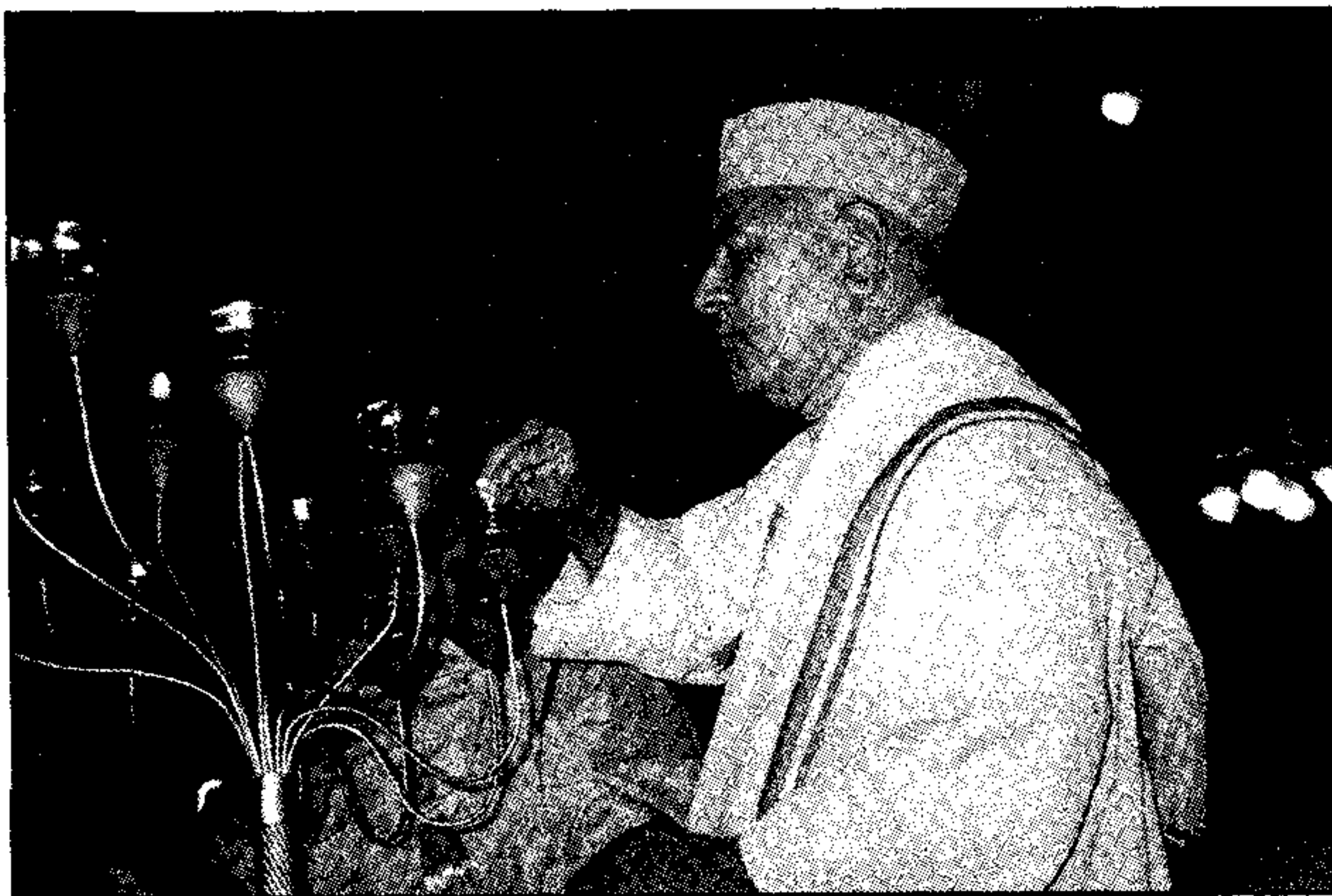
Hinduism to the West, the monks of his order gathered in a small, rural town in western Michigan, named, propitiously, after India's most holy river, Ganges, to usher in the new millennium.

Billed as 'Vedanta in the Third Millennium', the three-day conference attracted nearly 800 followers from around the US. It was among the largest assemblies of monks of the Ramakrishna Order in the history of the West. Swami Chidananda, chief organizer of the event, and abbot of Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago, said, 'This most sacred, historic, epoch making, and thrilling event is the first of its kind in the USA.'

All told, sixteen swamis attended, and the event attracted considerable US media attention. It began on Friday evening, 22 June 2001, when the swamis gathered together at

the 110-acre Vivekananda Monastery and Retreat in Ganges. The swamis sat on chairs in a

semicircle in 'Millennium Hall' facing their audience, with a backdrop of the seal of the Ramakrishna Order and larger-than-life-size photographs of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.



Swami Gautamanandaji inaugurating the conference

Swami

Gautamanand

aji, the president of Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, who was the guest of honour, inaugurated the conference by lighting the lamp. Then Swami Chidananda sang a Sanskrit invocation. After introducing the swamis, Swami Chidananda spoke: 'The whole universe is filled with God-consciousness. To realize this one has to resort to Vedanta. The means are yoga and spiritual practices. Through spiritual practices, the inner divinity—now in a dormant state—awakens. Once you become aware of your spiritual identity, you will become truly happy and peaceful in this life.'

Suffering comes only from not knowing the Self.'

Over the three-day conference, the monks discussed the role of Vedanta in society. However, personal spiritual instruction and practical guidance was the main emphasis.

Swami Brahmarupananda of Washington DC, spoke of how technology can effect both tremendous good and enormous evil. 'It reinforces the age-old truth that we are all interdependent; we are all one,' he said. 'Technology is value-blind, though. A sense of good and bad is not inherent in technology. That's why our beliefs assume a greater importance in the new millennium.'

During the three-day conference, the devotees kept a well-regulated schedule. Meditation began at 5:15 am, followed at 6.00 am by *ārati*. Breakfast was at 7:30. By 9:00, they were in Millennium Hall to hear lectures by each of the swamis sequentially.

In between discourses, bhajans were sung by Dr Ram Bala and his group. There were breaks for meals and free times, which enabled many to meet the swamis individually amidst the lush and spacious monastery grounds. At 6 pm, they assembled for *ārati* and meditation. Dinner was at 7.30, followed by evening lectures and informal meetings. News stories about the this conference appeared in the *New York Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Chicago Sun Times*, and numerous other publications in the US.

How did the participants feel? Dr Asha

Master, MD, from Fulton, Illinois, said she was 'thrilled' to see the swamis. 'This is a great step in my spiritual life,' she said. 'My quest is to be where these masters are.' Anjali Shete, 29, a computer programmer from Farmington Hills, Michigan, agreed. She told the *Detroit Free Press*: 'I'm extremely excited just to be able to physically see all the swamis and to listen to their talks and see everybody in their own spiritual journey. This is a great privilege.' Arundhati Kale came from her home in Houston, Texas, in order to have 'the holy company and feel the vibrations. It's peaceful and joyous.' Mithilesh Mishra, who teaches Hindi at the University of Chicago, said: 'From a purely Indian point of view, if anytime there is a

gathering of truly holy men and women, that gathering itself is of great spiritual significance. Even if the Swamis didn't talk, even if they just stayed for three days in silence, people would find it very uplifting, very inspiring.' Janet Poole, Naples, Florida, was

raised a Protestant and considers herself a Christian. She attended the event 'partly out of curiosity,' but found herself 'tremendously impressed' by the swamis. 'I'm just discovering all about it, and it's fascinating what I'm learning,' Poole was quoted in the *New York Times*. 'In the final analysis, the worshippers had a rare opportunity to see sixteen swamis, who are living the life spoken of by the sages and prophets of all religions,' Ms Poole said. 'I think the mood here has been one of fulfilment.'

A number of Christians also attended.



The conference in progress

Bill Rhodes and Chris St John, both from Holland, Michigan, are members of the Episcopal Church. They said they found the teachings similar to Christian teachings. 'We are taught to be good stewards of the land and resources,' St John was quoted in an article for the Associated Press.

On Saturday evening, 23 June 2001, Swami Chetanananda, head of the St Louis monastery and an author of several books on the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples, presented a slide show with photographs associated with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideals.

Amongst the monks present were, Swami Tathagatananda, New York; Swami Prabuddhananda, San Francisco; Swami Pramathananda, Toronto, Canada; Swami Aparananda, Berkeley; Swami Chetanananda, St Louis; Swami Atmarupananda, Ridgely Manor; Swami Shantarupananda, Portland; Swami Prapannananda, Sacramento; Swami Sarvadevananda, Hollywood; Swami Brahmarupananda, Washington DC; and Swami Tyagananda, Boston, apart from Swamis Chidananda and Gautamananda.

On Sunday morning, Swami Gautamananda gave the 'valedictory' address,

enumerating five spiritual principles which he hoped would find widespread acceptance in the next millennium:

1. Rationality: the courage to find truth against all superstitions, books and organizations.
2. To find God in all human beings and render dedicated service to God as man.
3. To believe in a God of love and give up all fear of Him.
4. To give up undue sense pleasures which make us slaves to the body.
5. To make the realization of God the goal of life. 'Wisdom and loving service should be the hallmark of the perfected man.'

Swami Gautamananda urged the attendees, among whom were medical doctors, engineers, businessmen, and college professors, to turn their minds towards God and spend more time on spiritual causes. 'Success has to be tempered with spiritual life,' he said. As the conference neared conclusion, Swami Gautamananda invoked the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda upon the assembled devotees, and, he said, upon all humanity throughout the next millennium. □

Swami Brahmananda on Holy Company

Disciple: Maharaj, there are some who believe that merely keeping company with the holy is enough. One need do no more.

Maharaj: No! Merely to keep the company of the holy is not enough. You must open your heart and ask them to solve your doubts. You must carefully observe their lives and imitate their example. It is a lazy man's attitude to think that all one needs to do is to associate with the holy. Needless to say, association is also very important. For, in their company, doubts are removed and pure thoughts awakened. Neither scriptures nor books can create as pure impressions nor transform a man's life as much as contact with an illumined soul

The Lord's Name

Suppose someone does something wrong to us, or even suppose we imagine that someone has wronged us; we ordinary people remember this for years, and at the opportune moment, pay that someone back with compound interest. But true saints are different. Christ prayed for his tormentors: 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (*St Luke*, 24.34). Here's the story of a saint who blessed those who tortured him.

Haridas! The so-called *yavana* (non-Hindu)! What a glorious life he led! All that he knew was the Lord and His name. But what a price he had to pay for his devotion!

His torturers pulled and dragged Haridas. They threw him on the ground and beat him with sticks at every marketplace. Skin peeled off, and the whole body was covered with blood. People gathered around and saw with intense pain the horrible violence meted out to him. They were shocked at such inhuman treatment given to a holy man. But what about the tormented saint himself?

Haridas only prayed: 'O Lord! Please forgive these ignorant people. Please have mercy on them.' Tears rolled down his cheeks even while blood gushed out of his wounds. But those tears weren't for the pain he suffered. He wept for the torturers because he feared that their sins may bring immense suffering to the king and the torturers.

The torturers went on with their duties. They had been ordered to kill Haridas by dragging him through the twelve bazaars of the Gauda kingdom and beating him with sticks. His crime? He was caught repeating the names of Hari though brought up in a Muslim family. Hussain Shah of Gauda was enraged when he heard from the *kazis* of Shantipur that Haridas was repeating the name of the Hindu god incessantly, and was also spreading the

message of japa everywhere. He had Haridas brought before him, and asked him: 'Aren't you ashamed to follow kafirs? Why are you repeating the names of Hindu gods?' Haridas said with a smile: 'He who is Rama is also Rahim. Hindus and Muslims are one and the same. The Bhagavan of the Hindus and the *Khuda* of Muslims is one and the same. The difference is only in the names, but God is one.'

Hussain Shah was not to be pleased with such words. If you are in power, you will be deaf to sane words. So the verdict was torture.

The more the torturers beat him, the more fervent became Haridas' prayers: 'O Hari! Forgive these ignorant people! They are not committing any sin. Please forgive them.'

Onlookers wept seeing this saint. They were helpless. The stone-hearted torturers too became tired and quite vexed with this peculiar prisoner. He wouldn't die! They said finally: 'Thakur, please die soon. If not, we will be killed.' Seeing their predicament, Haridas laughed even in pain and said: 'All right, I shall die. You needn't have to be afraid.'

Forgetting his bleeding person, Haridas sat in meditation. And soon he went into samadhi. Seeing his state, the torturers were happy that their victim had died and threw him into the Ganga. Mother Ganga too must have wept seeing her beloved child's condition. She took her son in her arms, wiped the blood off his wounds, and put him the other shore.

Manohar Chakraborty and Ujjvala Devi gave birth to a son around 1450 AD in some remote village called Bhat-Kolagachi in Jessore, Bengal. That child was Haridas. Manohar passed away when Haridas was only two years old, and his pious wife committed sati.

Orphaned, the beautiful little Haridas was taken away by a Muslim family during a communal tussle. He was taken good care of by his foster parents. They wanted him to learn Arabic, Persian, etc, but Haridas loved to read the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Haridas grew up to be a handsome young man. But his mind was always immersed in God. When his foster father tried to arrange for his marriage, Haridas ran away from his house.

A new life had begun for Haridas. He repeated Hari's name with great devotion always. He ate what fate brought him. He resorted to lonely places. People would come in search of him and give him some food. When his fame would spread in some area, he would quietly quit that place and go elsewhere.

Haridas thus came to Nadia, the sacred source from where the flood of devotion was to inundate the world soon. He met Advaitacharya, a well-known devotee, and the latter was astounded to see the towering personality in Haridas. Ignoring the caste problems of his times, Advaitacharya embraced Haridas and began to treat him like a brahmin. Both would weep and pray to the Lord to come down to the earth and re-establish dharma, which was on the decline. Advaitacharya initiated Haridas into the Krishna mantra. Since that very day, Haridas began repeating his mantra at least 300,000 times a day. Seeing his guru suffering at the hands of caste-ridden Hindus of the locality, Haridas left Nadia and went to Fulia. Here, an arrogant landlord by name Ramachandra Khan put him to test. He sent a dancer to spoil his devotion. But the dancer was thrilled to listen to his loud repetition of the Lord's name, and she herself became a great devotee soon.

In time, fate led Haridas to Shantipur. And it was here that King Hussain Shah tortured him. But Haridas survived. His wounds healed and he continued his sadhana.

The long-awaited day arrived at last. The Lord came down as Sri Chaitanya to protect dharma. When Haridas saw Sri Chaitanya for

the first time, he was thrilled beyond measure. That day, hundreds of devout men and women were worshipping his feet. Haridas saw Sri Chaitanya from a distance only and assuaged the thirst of his heart. When Sri Chaitanya offered a seat to him, Haridas was overpowered with emotion and raised the seat onto his head. 'From today I am your dog, my Lord, and I shall remain at your door always. Throw me a handful of stale food, and that will do.' His humility pleased the Lord, and Sri Chaitanya embraced Haridas.

Their next meeting was at Nilachala (Puri). Having been brought up in a Muslim family, Haridas wouldn't enter the temple of Jagannatha. So he stood at a distance and shed tears of joy at the very thought of Sri Chaitanya. He fell on the ground and began to rub his face in the mud. Hearing about this great devotee, Sri Chaitanya himself came rushing towards him and embraced him. What's more, Chaitanya exclaimed: 'By touching your holy person, I have become pure!'

Haridas settled down at the flower garden in Puri. He spent his days in japa and kirtans. He would rise up early if at all he slept at night, and take bath. He would then perform japa. He wouldn't eat anything until he had repeated Hari's name 300,000 times.

It was the year 1534. The last day of his life had come. Haridas was worried lest he should pass away without completing his daily japa. Hundreds of devotees had assembled, and Sri Chaitanya himself was present. Haridas completed his daily routine and lay down. He went on looking at the holy face of Sri Chaitanya. A few drops of tears fell from his eyes. And then everything was over.

Sri Chaitanya became grave for some time. He then lifted the holy person of Haridas and began to dance. All the assembled devotees too began to dance. The ecstatic dance continued for a long time. Haridas was laid to rest at the same place where his little hut was situated. Today, this place is a pilgrim centre in Puri. □

Book Reviews

JOURNEYS WITH RAMAKRISHNA: By Swami Prabhananda. Published by Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600004. 2001. Pp. xxii+265. Rs. 45.

It was more than a century ago. The rumour spread everywhere that a man had come to Shyambazar, who died seven times a day while singing kirtan, and then came back alive again. Was it a rumour? Let's examine. This 'man' was none other than the latest and the greatest in the line of the Great Masters, Sri Ramakrishna.

Fancy a pilgrimage with him! Yes, it's possible. Here's a compelling, compendious work that ventures to project a particular phase of Sri Ramakrishna's life and pilgrimage. To peruse this book means to embark on a spiritual odyssey, going down memory lane, and tracing the fresh footsteps of one who was a living and moving pilgrim centre.

A true-to-life portrayal of Sri Ramakrishna's pilgrimages, *Journeys with Ramakrishna* studies him amidst some of the most treasured holy places of India—Varanasi, Vrindaban, Prayag, Vaidyanath Dham, Navadwip, and many more. One of the many salutary features of this book is that the reader may start from any chapter he is especially interested in, and then proceed. All the chapters stand independent. If the reader feels he should be with the Master in Panihati, he may safely skip the initial chapters and land up in the joyous mart of *Harinama* and taste the waves of bliss that the Master had set in motion then.

The life of an avatar may be studied from various angles: especially from the standpoints of pure history or spirituality or even values alone. This work is a judicious combination of all the three, and the author successfully maintains a beautiful balance, thus making this work equally important for a researcher as well as for a devout follower of Sri

Ramakrishna. The author, needless to mention, well known for his capacity for thorough research, has sketched the picture of Sri Ramakrishna along historical lines and, at the same time, kept the spiritual life shining in the forefront in all the chapters. The chapters narrating Sri Ramakrishna's visit to Navadwip, Panihati, and the Rathayatra of Mahesh are particularly fascinating, for we find Sri Ramakrishna juxtaposed with Sri Chaitanya there and studied from the angles of their historical and spiritual significance as far as the spiritual rejuvenation of the land is concerned.

Copious notes throwing fresh light on the hitherto unknown facts, events and circumstances make the book a valuable treasure. It is further made rich with numerous interesting illustrations, printed on ordinary paper but exceedingly well, and maps along with a captivating narration. On the whole, all this makes the reader breathe the very air of those places which the Master had visited. A similar book had earlier been brought out in Bengali, but this work has no parallel. There has been no detailed account of Sri Ramakrishna's pilgrimages in English barring a small booklet, *His Divine Footsteps*. In this book, a long-standing need of English readers gets fulfilled.

Finally, it makes the reader catch a glimpse of the incarnation's role in the spiritual well-being of humanity—how he rejuvenates and rediscovers the hidden layers of spirituality in old pilgrim centres and thus makes them dynamos of spiritual emotion so that we mortal pilgrims can avail a drop of that bliss and be sanctified.

The book has been priced very low, only Rs.45, and the printing has been very good.

If you desire to go on a pilgrimage, then here's the door.

Brahmachari Dhyana Chaitanya
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

Books Received

1. **AYURVEDIC COOKING:** By Ramesh Patel. Pp. 153. Rs.125.
2. **THE AYURVEDIC DIET:** By Dennis Thompson. Edited by Susan Tinkle. Pp. 175. Rs.195.
3. **BREATHE FREE:** By Daniel Gagnon and Amadea Morningstar. Pp. 180. Rs.195.
4. **THE HEART OF HEALING:** By Caroline Latham. Pp. 80. Rs.95.
5. **FENG SHUI FOR THE BODY:** By Daniel Santos. Pp. 248. Rs.195.

All the above books are published by
New Age Books, A-44 Naraina, Phase I, New Delhi 110028

News and Reports

Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral Home

On 10 March 2001 Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, laid the foundation-stone for the cultural centre at Swami Vivekananda's ancestral house in Kolkata in the presence of a good number of monks, dignitaries and devotees and presided over the meeting held on this occasion on the premises. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji, also Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and Sri Ajit Kumar Panja, then Minister of State for External Affairs, Government of India, addressed the gathering.

New Temple in Bangladesh

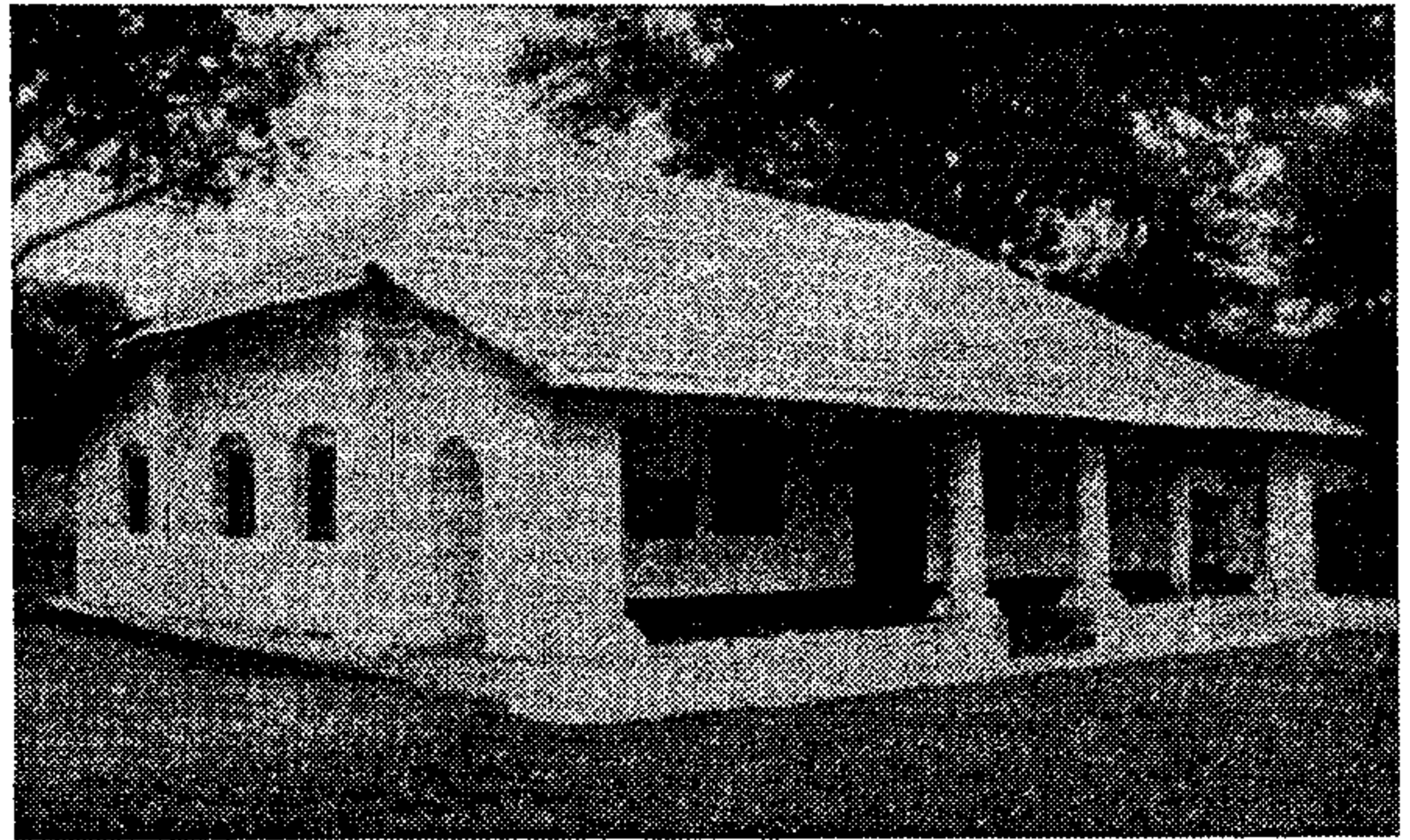
The newly built Sri Ramakrishna Temple at Ramakrishna Math, Bagerhat, Bangladesh, was dedicated by Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj on 29 March 2001. The four-day function organized from 27 to 30 March in connection with the dedication of the temple and the platinum jubilee of the ashram was attended by 33 monastics and thousands of devotees. Various public meetings held on this occasion were addressed among others by Swami Gahananandaji, Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, and Dr S.A. Malik, Political Adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

General Secretary Addresses NGO Meet

Swami Smarananandaji among others addressed a meeting of non-governmental organizations with Mr W.J. Clinton, former President of the USA, hosted by Sri Viren J. Shah, Governor of West Bengal, at Raj Bhavan, Kolkata, on 7 April 2001.

Swamiji's Bungalow in Belgaum Renovated

At Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum, Sri S.M. Krishna, Chief Minister of Karnataka, inaugurated on 23 May 2001 the renovated bungalow where Swami Vivekananda had stayed for nine days during his *parivrajaka* days in 1892. The public meeting held on this occasion was addressed among others by the Chief Minister and Swami Smarananandaji, and was presided over by Sri Dharam Singh, Minister for Public Works, Government of Karnataka. Swami Smarananandaji also laid the foundation-stone for the proposed monks' quarters of the Ashrama.



The bungalow in which Swamiji stayed while in Belgaum

Governor Inaugurates Kankhal Centenary Celebrations

On 6 June 2001, Sri S.S. Barnala, Governor of Uttaranchal, inaugurated the centenary celebrations of Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal, and addressed the gathering. A good number of monks belonging to different Hindu denominations, dignitaries, and people from several walks of life attended the function.

Platinum Jubilee of Batticaloa Students' Home

The students' home at the Batticaloa sub-centre of Ramakrishna Mission, Colombo, celebrated its platinum jubilee on 6 and 7 June 2001. A large procession with a number of decorative floats, a public meeting addressed by distinguished speakers, and cultural programmes formed part of the celebration which was attended by thousands of students, devotees, well-wishers and friends. A souvenir brought out on the occasion was released by Swami Shivamayandaji, an Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission.